# A GREAT COQUETTE
## MADAME RECAMIER AND HER SALON

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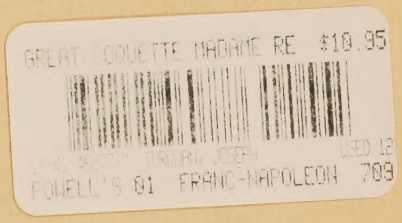
Charleston

1913 -



# A GREAT COQUETTE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LOVE AFFAIRS OF NAPOLEON

Photo Levy, Paris

*Madame Récamier*

*after the portrait by Madame Mosen at Versailles*

# A GREAT COQUETTE

## MADAME RECAMIER AND HER SALON

BY
JOSEPH
TURQUAN

WITH A PHOTOGRAVURE FRONTISPIECE AND FIFTEEN OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

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# INTRODUCTION

## TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

THE preliminaries of peace, signed at Lunéville between France and England, were received with unbounded joy when made known in the two countries on October 3, 1801. Paris and London alike were illuminated. Bells were rung, flags hoisted, and every face beamed as if the compromise had been a victory, and, in a way, victory it was,—a victory of peace over war, of tranquillity over anguish, of ease over discomfort, of construction over destruction. These glorious demonstrations were renewed on March 26, 1802, when the roar of cannon announced in London, as in Paris, that the peace between the two nations had been definitely signed at Amiens. This time official manifestations were added to the public happiness. There were rejoicings in the palace as in the street.

The interests of the two neighbours were intimately bound up. England had need of the products of the soil of France, as France, in her turn, required the manufactures of England. Commerce, so active between the two countries before 1793, had died away since the declaration of war. Now the ravage was being repaired; business prospects visibly brightened; and the universal spirits rose. A new era was soon to relegate to oblivion the recollection of the mourning, the sufferings, the losses, and the anguish of the past.

In the meanwhile, the English leisured classes had naturally suffered least from the war, and were more eager than ever in a great haste to travel in France. Men of thought and intelligence wished to study *de visu* how the terrible

revolution had influenced manners and social life. Politicians, literary men, and scientists crowded those Parisian salons which commenced to re-open during the winter of 1801-1802. Amongst the visitors were Fox, Lord Elgin, Lord Holland, Lord Erskine, and Macintosh. Women of the highest distinction, by rank or talent, joined them, amongst them the Duchess of Gordon, Lady Cunningham, and Lady Hester Stanhope. They mixed with the women of the new society in France. They were seen at the houses of Madame Junot, the future Duchesse d'Abrantès, Madame Regnault (de Saint Jean d' Angely), wife of the Councillor of State, and in the homes of returned *emigrés* whom they had known in London, the De Bouillé, the Montmorency, and the De l'Aigle. Never had so many English been seen in Paris. They took an active interest in studying a society that had been born yesterday, and had hardly incorporated itself with the ruins of its predecessor. These visitors felt that they were witnesses of a great epoch in the life of the French people, an era of complete transformation and renaissance, which had left a deep mark in the history of nations, and even of humanity.

The French profited by a peace so ardently desired, and yet unhappily destined to be of short duration. Few of them, however, crossed the Channel. There were not the same reasons of intense curiosity to attract them to London as took the English to Paris. Besides, they were still of home-keeping habit, and their fortunes had suffered such ravages, their financial disasters had been so widespread, so numerous, and so often repeated, that their chief aim was to preserve the little that was left. On the other hand, there was a section of this society, chiefly the *nouveaux riches*, army contractors who had become wealthy through the misery of the troops and the public distress, brokers, speculators, and bankers, who had gained money by reason of the general penury.

These were the only people in a position to travel abroad. It became fashionable amongst them to sojourn awhile in England. Those who were kept in Paris by business (which

each day took a steady upward tendency), voluntarily sent their families. Madame Récamier had the glory of receiving in her brilliant mansion in the Rue du Mont-Blanc all the most distinguished English visitors to Paris. They invited her to their own country, and she decided to visit London, which she had never seen. Her husband liberally supplied letters of credit upon the English banking houses, and, thus provided, Madame Récamier entered on her journey in company with her mother.

Independently of the acquaintances she had already formed, Madame Récamier wished to make new friends. She carried a number of letters of recommendation given to her by the Duc de Guignes, who, twenty years previously, had been ambassador from Louis XVI. to London. A man of wit, who in his youth had been received in the salon of Madame de Luxembourg (one might say that he was the chief of her circle), his embassy had left the remembrance of an amiable personality with perfect manners. His success had even been spoken of in another direction. Now he was aged, but, forgetting his years in the presence of a pretty woman, the former ambassador had graciously given to Madame Récamier letters of introduction to all his friends in England.

Upon her arrival in London, Juliette Récamier had been received in every drawing-room with flattering attentions. Although English beauty is the finest and most aristocratic that exists, her beauty was at once recognised. Her grace of manner completed the charm. She became intimate with the best-known women in the highest circles of English society, and she attracted the homage of the most distinguished men of the time. It may be said that she never lost these friendships, and her London friends, when visiting Paris, did not forget to renew their former intercourse.

The enthusiasm for Madame Récamier quickly passed from these exalted quarters to the middle classes, and even to the people. This young foreigner enjoyed her success, and loved to advertise in the most frequented public places

her extreme modesty. At the theatre, crowds pressed forward to admire her more closely. Her first appearance was made in the company of the Duchess of Devonshire. "The Duchess," wrote Chateaubriand, "was then about forty-five to fifty. She was still fashionable and beautiful, though deprived of an eye, which she covered with a lock of her hair." Under such patronage the Frenchwoman could only be received with favour. "The Duchess took her to her box at the Opera, where they found the Prince of Wales, the Duc d'Orléans, and his brothers, the Duc de Montpensier, and the Comte de Beaujolais. Two of them were destined to be kings, one gained a throne, the other was parted from it by an abyss. All opera-glasses were turned towards the Duchess's box. The Prince of Wales told Madame Récamier that, if she did not wish to be suffocated, it was necessary to leave before the end of the performance. Hardly had she got to her feet than the doors of all the boxes opened precipitately. She was unable to escape, and was carried by the crowd to the door of her carriage."

The next day, gossip hummed with the tale of the sympathy Madame Récamier had evoked. The newspapers registered her triumphant success. When she was seen in Kensington Gardens accompanied by the Marquis of Douglas,[1] and his sister, the Duchess of Somerset, the crowd gathered round her. On every side her steps were followed. "This happened each time she appeared in public," said Chateaubriand. "The papers were full of her name, and her portrait, by Bartolozzi, was scattered throughout England." The news of this triumph crossed the Channel. If there was criticism, it did not come from General Bernadotte. This former sergeant, the future king of Sweden, and founder of the reigning dynasty, was delighted at the success of the incomparable woman whose humble and adoring servant he had once been. Concerning one report that some men had been knocked down in the general

[1] In 1830, as Duke of Hamilton, he received the exiled Charles X. at Holyrood.

struggle to see her more closely, General Bernadotte wrote to her in his best style.

"I did not answer your letter immediately, madame, because I hoped each day to see the announcement of your nomination as ambassador to the Court of Saint James. A rumour, which had some foundation, designated Berthier as minister. To-day there is no longer any question of him, and opinion has decided upon an appointment more essential to the public well-being.

"The English newspapers, whilst calming my anxiety about your health, tell me of the dangers to which you are exposed. At first I blamed the citizens of London for their too great eagerness; but, I admit it, they have soon been pardoned. For I am ready with my testimony when justification is needed for people who are indiscreet enough to admire the charms of your heavenly figure.

"In the midst of the sensation which surrounds you, and which you merit in so many ways, deign to remember sometimes that the being most devoted to you in nature is

BERNADOTTE."

It was the fashion to finish a letter in this puzzling manner, but how the former sergeant must have worried his brain before finally evolving so gallant a phrase!

The journey to England was one of Madame Récamier's supreme triumphs. It consecrated for ever the glory of this pretty woman. It completely satisfied her little, as well as her big vanities. But unfortunately everything must come to an end, and particularly the happy days. Madame Récamier had to consider the necessity of quitting London, the city of enchantment. She said good-bye to her new friends, making them promise to visit her in Paris. On the eve of her departure the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Devonshire did her the honour of asking her to receive them, and also to allow them to bring some of the members of their circle. The young Frenchwoman was delighted to entertain such guests, but she was sad at the thought that her holiday in London was over. Her guests were not less

sad in remembering that this charming woman was so soon to leave them. To frighten away such melancholy thoughts, music was called for. Together with the Chevalier Marin, the cleverest harpist of the period, Madame Récamier played some variations on a theme by Mozart. Hours passed as if by magic. The remembrance she left can only be compared to that of a sweet perfume, which, instead of evaporating, becomes stronger and stronger with time, acquiring a more and more penetrating life.

The papers spoke of this last soirée in London as a fête offered to the Prince of Wales by the beautiful Frenchwoman in recognition of the flattering and warm-hearted welcome she had received from the English people.

The qualities which had been appreciated so much in her are virtues we often meet with in English women. They are discretion, distinction, softness, tenderness, and compassion. She was a woman of delicate and just intelligence. " Madame Récamier has in her character what Shakespeare calls ' the milk of human kindness,' " said one who knew her well.

My book contains the history of a woman who fascinated at every step.

JOSEPH TURQUAN.

PARIS, *January*, 1913.

# PREFACE

MONTESQUIEU said that history consists of false facts based upon, or inspired by truth. The same remark may be applied to biography. The modern custom—general as well as academic—of exaggerated praise and suppressed blame, gives us very false ideas of the people whose portraits are supposed to be under discussion. If we confine ourselves to the volumes Madame Lenormant has devoted to her illustrious aunt, we receive but an incomplete impression of Madame Récamier. These books are less a history of her than documents to assist the historian. Human nature is made to give way so often to the display of things as they should be, that her true features become masked. The facts have to be passed through the sieve of an impartial critic. They require interpretation, as well as completion. During the last thirty years, the publication of the letters and memoirs of her contemporaries has prompted us to exercise a necessary discrimination.

In these pages an endeavour has been made to present the real Madame Récamier. There are certain mysterious incidents in the life of this great coquette which other pens —less ardent for the truth—have discreetly left in the shade. I have not retreated before such depths. I have tried to discover by what means she attracted the attention of the world of Paris for more than half-a-century, and the reason of her success in reigning over a court that included princes, dukes, ministers, and celebrities of every description. In this respect the story of Madame Récamier becomes the story of all her most distinguished contemporaries. It is difficult to represent her in isolation, without her attendants,

her staff of great personages and distinguished men and women.

Faithful to my habit of sincerity and absolute impartiality, I have dared to say everything. In drawing this portrait I have tried to made it true, rather than official. And there will not be found that excess of commendation, without the slightest moderation, which usually accompanies any mention of Chateaubriand's friend. If my irreverence, either in thought or in expression, be considered too strong, I ask pardon. My desire is to attain sincerity. There will be some who, interested personally in the reputation of Madame Récamier, will blame me for my frankness. What am I to do? Let us allow the living to paint their faces, or those of their friends, if they find it pleasant. But let us not make a mockery of the dead. Besides, many of the statements in my book were whispered in the salons of Paris during the lifetime of Madame Récamier. The historian and the biographer have a right to make use of them. And this is what I have done.

In finishing my preface, I must thank many friends, who have communicated with much good will a number of precious and unpublished papers. These will be found incorporated in my pages.

JOSEPH TURQUAN.

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

PAGE

Marat's day of triumph—A marriage at the Hôtel de Ville—Mademoiselle Juliette Bernard—Her portrait—Juliette's father—The parasites of pre-revolutionary days—Monsieur Simonard—Juliette's childhood—her first admirer—the dictionary of her adorers—Juliette comes to Paris—Her education—Her taste for music—Madame Bernard's salon—Monsieur Récamier—He asks Juliette in marriage—A delicate question—Some theories—Récamier's distractions after his marriage—A poor character and a great fortune—The world of the Directory—Madame Récamier takes a prominent part in it—Retrospective scruples—Madame Récamier's dancing powers . . . . 25

## CHAPTER II

Madame de Staël—At the Château de Clichy—Friendship between Madame Récamier and Madame de Staël—Origin of this intimacy—Madame Récamier's home—How a "merveilleuse" furnished in the days of the Directory—Madame Récamier's worldly tastes—Her ambitious projects—She forms a salon—Her friends: Barère, La Harpe, Lemontey, Camille Jordan, Ducis, Monmerqué, Ouvrard, etc.—Madame Récamier's receptions—The world of finance—Madame Récamier's hostility to the First Consul—Monsieur Bernard—Description of Mathieu de Montmorency—Adrien de Montmorency—Madame Récamier and Eugène de Beauharnais . . . 55

## CHAPTER III

MadameRécamier and the Bonaparte family—A little coquetry—Madame Récamier makes advances to Lucien Bonaparte, and to Eugène de Beauharnais—Portrait of Lucien

PAGE

—Madame Récamier's amiability hides her material interests—Rectification of dates—Juliette's lack of dignity —A love letter from Romeo to Juliette—An easy-going husband—End of the idyll—Lucien's vengeance—Politics of the salon—Scepticism and amiable egoism confused with kindness—Madame Récamier's salon under the Consulate—The impression made upon strangers—Intolerance of the First Consul—David's portrait of Madame Récamier—Service at the church of Saint Roch—Madame Récamier in London . . . . . 80

CHAPTER IV

Madame Récamier's hostility towards the First Consul becomes accentuated—She attends the trial of General Moreau—Kotzebue, Benjamin Constant, and Madame Hamelin—Monsieur de Montrond and Madame Récamier: slanders—The Minister of Police and Madame Récamier —The Princess Caroline comes to the assistance of Fouché —Madame Récamier's refusal—Her husband becomes bankrupt—Juliette retires into the country under the pretext that she has been exiled—A carriage accident— The Château de Coppet—Madame Récamier stays with Madame de Staël—Prince Augustus of Prussia falls in love with Juliette—She asks her husband to consent to a divorce so that she may marry the Prince of Prussia— Monsieur Récamier's just remarks—His wife can see no other solution but suicide—Behaviour of Madame de Staël—Juliette remains faithful to the memory of the Prince of Prussia . . . . . 111

CHAPTER V

Benjamin Constant reads his romance *Adolphe* at Madame Récamier's house—Madame Récamier and Madame de Staël at Chaumont and Fossé—Madame de Staël's book on Germany confiscated—Exile of Monsieur de Montmorency —Exile of Madame Récamier—The beautiful Juliette retires to Chalons—Mademoiselle Amélie Cyvoct— Madame Récamier's wish to visit Coppet—The reason why Madame de Staël did not want to receive her—Madame Récamier settles at Lyons—Portrait of Monsieur Ballanche —Auguste de Staël—Departure for Italy—Ballanche joins her at Rome—Madame Récamier's kindness—

PAGE

She goes to Naples—She is welcomed by the King and Queen of Naples—Household details—Treachery—Madame Récamier obtains a pardon for a condemned prisoner—Her return to Rome—She disturbs the sculptor Canova . . . . . 140

## CHAPTER VI

After the fall of Napoleon, Madame Récamier returns to Paris—The salons of the Restoration—Madame Récamier has no influence over them—Fashionable prejudices—Madame de Genlis—She makes Madame Récamier write her memoirs—Was Madame Récamier intelligent?—Madame de Genlis praises her—Queen Hortense invites Madame Récamier and Madame de Staël to Saint Leu—Queen Caroline—Description of Benjamin Constant—Madame Récamier encourages him—Her coquetry—Madame Ancelot reveals the hidden game—Benjamin Constant allows himself to be caught—His private journal—His letters to Madame Récamier . . . . . 168

## CHAPTER VII

Continuation of the story of Benjamin Constant's passion for Madame Récamier—Storms—Monsieur de Forbin—Jealous rivals—Madame Récamier's court—Quarrels—Madame Récamier pouts—generosity of the lovers—Madame Récamier's childish behaviour at Monsieur Greffulhe's ball—For love of Madame Récamier Benjamin Constant becomes a royalist—Juliette's hard heart—Benjamin is created a Councillor of State by the Emperor—He returns to Madame Récamier—His duel with Monsieur de Montlosier—Always in love—"A dry soul"—Madame de Krüdener—Monsieur de Constant's mysticism—Madame Récamier's toilettes disturb the fervour of the neophytes—Benjamin Constant is more reasonable—Disastrous effect of his passion for Madame Récamier upon his genius . . . . . 192

## CHAPTER VIII

Madame Récamier welcomes the Duke of Wellington—Illness and death of Madame de Staël—Madame Récamier

PAGE

meets Chateaubriand at the coffin of Madame de Staël—Auguste Barbier and Madame Récamier—Madame Récamier goes to Aix-la-Chapelle—Reason for the journey—Chateaubriand takes the habit of visiting Madame Récamier—Monsieur de Montmorency's jealousy—A conspiracy against Chateaubriand—A quarrel—A singular moral remedy—Madame Récamier is ruined for the second time—She retires to the Abbaye-aux-Bois—Her friends do not desert her—Chateaubriand's morose humour—Miss Mary Clarke—Madame Récamier is jealous—A vain parade of names and titles—Portrait of Ampère—He falls in love with Madame Récamier—Her coquetry towards him—She is compared to Ninon de Lenclos and Madame Geoffrin—Mademoiselle Delphine Gay . . . . 213

CHAPTER IX

Mathieu de Montmorency tries to remove Chateaubriand from Paris—He helps to obtain his nomination to the ambassadorship at Berlin—Military plots under the Restoration—Madame Récamier attempts to save two criminals: she saves one—Bad will of Monsieur de Montmorency—Madame Récamier again intervenes for a pardon—Chateaubriand, Ambassador in London—Madame Récamier helps Chateaubriand to be appointed an envoy to the Congress of Verona—Rivalry of Mathieu and Chateaubriand—Madame Récamier seeks to maintain a friendship between them—Chateaubriand's joy at being nominated a minister—Madame Récamier goes to Italy—She interviews Queen Hortense at Rome—Her religious inclinations—She visits Naples—Brutal dismissal of Chateaubriand—Monsieur Charles Lenormant is betrothed to Mademoiselle Cyvoct—Madame Récamier returns to Paris after a stay at Trieste . . . . . 244

CHAPTER X

Description of Madame de Chateaubriand—Marriage of Monsieur Lenormant—Madame Récamier presses Mathieu de Montmorency on the Académie française—Monsieur de Latouche—Death of Mathieu—Chateaubriand is named ambassador at Rome—Jealousy of Madame Récamier—Chateaubriand in Paris—His dream of a

PAGE

life in common with Madame Récamier at Rome—His drama *Moïse* is read at the Abbaye-aux-Bois—Madame Récamier a widow—She goes to Dieppe—Revolution of July, 1830—Her salon at this period—Did Balzac read *La peau de chagrin* there ? Madame Récamier appears in this novel in the character of Fédora—Reasons why Balzac did not please Madame Récamier—Her preference for Paul de Kock . . . . . 268

## CHAPTER XI

Madame Récamier does not neglect to beat up recruits for her salon—Personal interests which guided her in the search—The Abbé de Lamennais—Arrest of Chateaubriand—The cholera epidemic of 1832—The Duc de Noailles—Reason for his visits to Madame Récamier—She rejoins Chateaubriand in Switzerland—She visits Queen Hortense at Arenenberg—A pious pilgrimage to Coppet—Chateaubriand goes to Prague, returns to Paris, and departs for Venice—His disillusions about the princes—He consoles himself by renewing his old habits near Madame Récamier—*Mémoires d'outre-tombe* read at the Abbaye-aux-Bois—Certain passages concerning Madame Récamier are suppressed—Philarète Chasles on the salon held at the Abbaye-aux-Bois . . . . . 289

## CHAPTER XII

Sainte-Beuve visits Madame Récamier—Monsieur Charles Lenormant—J. J. Ampère—Ballanche—Madame Récamier, Monsieur Pasquier and Madame de Boigne—Monsieur de Loménie—Monsieur Frédéric Ozanam—Monsieur Brifaut—Madame Récamier makes some Academicians—Madame de Girardin's salon—Madame Virginie Ancelot—Madame Amable Tastu—Madame Eugénie Foa—Madame Récamier's health begins to decline—Ampère is elected to the Academy—Death of Ballanche—Chateaubriand offers to marry Madame Récamier—Death of the author of *Les Martyrs*—Madame Récamier in mourning—Her portrait at this period as given by the Vicomtesse d'Agoult—The cholera of 1849—Death of Madame Récamier . . . . . 306

# ILLUSTRATIONS


MADAME RÉCAMIER . . . . . *Frontispiece*
After the Portrait by Madame Morin at Versailles.

PAGE

MADAME TALLIEN . . . . . 43
From the Engraving by W. Ward after the Portrait by Masquerier.

MADAME TALLIEN AND MADAME RÉCAMIER . . 51
After the Painting by Marguerite Gérard in the Bordeaux Museum.

MADAME DE STAËL . . . . . 57
From the Engraving by Hopwood after the Portrait by Madame le Brun.

NAPOLEON . . . . . 69
From the Engraving by Bartolozzi after Appiani, published in 1802.

PAULINE BORGHESE AND HER SON . . . 81
After the Painting by Prudhon in the Chartres Museum.

MADAME RÉCAMIER . . . . . 104
After the Painting by David in the Louvre.

MADAME RÉCAMIER . . . . . 135
After the Painting by Gérard in the Louvre.

CAROLINE BONAPARTE, QUEEN OF NAPLES . . 159

PAGE

MADAME DE GENLIS . . . . . 175
After a contemporary Engraving.

BENJAMIN CONSTANT . . . . . 193
After a contemporary Engraving.

CHATEAUBRIAND . . . . . 217
From the Engraving by Laugier after the Portrait by Girodet-Trioson.

DELPHINE GAY, MADAME EMILE DE GIRARDIN . 241
After a contemporary Lithograph.

JEROME NAPOLEON, KING OF WESTPHALIA . . 261
After a contemporary Portrait.

MADAME DE CHATEAUBRIAND . . . . 269
After a contemporary Engraving.

HORTENSE DE BEAUHARNAIS . . . . 293
After the Portrait by Prudhon in the Chartres Museum.

# A GREAT COQUETTE

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## CHAPTER I

ON the fifth day of the month "Floréal," in the first year of Liberty (April 24, 1793), a wild horde swept across the boulevards. The men, heroes of the September butcheries, sweating blood and crime beneath their dirty jackets and greasy red caps; the women, their faces and clothes covered with filth, their sleeves turned up above the elbow, their skirts torn into tatters. Clumsily and awkwardly, they moved forward amidst an overpowering fume of wine and brandy. A man, his forehead crowned with a wreath of oak leaves, was being carried before them in an arm-chair supported by four stout porters.

These were the "tricoteuses," or stocking-knitters, the worshippers of Saint Guillotine, strewing with flowers the path of their god, Marat.[1] Amidst an atmosphere of revolt and fevered debauch, the procession moved on, howling rough songs, and behaving with drunken and savage frenzy. Their god of the moment in no way recalled the beauty of Apollo. As monstrous as the fanatics surrounding him, he bawled and gesticulated from his chair, enjoying to the full his triumph, never dreaming of the

[1] Jean Paul Marat (1744-1793), the ultra-revolutionary doctor, who was largely responsible for the September massacres. With the help of Danton and Robespierre he managed to overthrow the Girondists, June 2, 1793, but his triumph was short lived. Assassinated in his bath by Charlotte Corday on the evening of the following July 13, his body was buried in the Pantheon, but public feeling changed and it was exhumed fifteen months later with every insult.

knife of the "Angel of Assassination"—to quote Lamartine, who poetically saw an angel in every woman. To-day Marat was being glorified and cheered to the skies. To-morrow his body was destined for the Pantheon. He could not foretell that a people which broke its idols as rapidly as a child smashes its playthings, would soon tear from the resting-place in the Square of the Carrousel the bust of its atheist god, would hang it from the lamp-post at the corner of the Rue Galande, finally breaking the marble into fragments and casting the pieces into the nearest gutter.

The hubbub of the crowd brooded over the city like the rumbling of distant thunder. Terrified by the bellowed hatred and shrieks of fury, the Parisians bolted themselves in their houses. A girl, not more than fifteen, dressed simply and without ostentation in the white clothes of a bride, stood on the steps of the Hôtel de Ville. Her father and mother were by her side. She had come to the Town Hall to be married.[1] Her fiancé and the witnesses followed behind. There were no friends in attendance. Perhaps no invitations had been issued, for the marriage party did not seem festive. The conversation was in whispers, and each person glanced uneasily from side to side. It looked almost as if the question was being debated whether marriage—the linking together of man and woman—on such a day was not a crime against liberty itself. In any case equality had been clearly disregarded. The beauty of the bride distinguished her in a very noticeable fashion from the mass of the population.

Before the mayor clad in his red bonnet and scarf of office, the girl stood and listened to a recital of the duties of husband and wife. She was solemn, although gravity was not her usual habit. Her serious looks could not for an instant have deceived any one. Each feature was ready to break into smiles. Under her white bonnet shone youth, grace, and beauty. Her waist might have been more

[1] "There was then but one municipality, which held its meetings at the Hôtel de Ville. In this building all the marriages were celebrated." Chancellor Pasquier, *Mémoires*, Vol. I., p. 90.

elegant, she lacked the suppleness and distinction that belong to every girl of good birth ; but her face was superb. Her eyes, tinted with orange, did not burn with intense fire, they threw out little passion, they appeared to twinkle—yet remained enchanting. She had rosy lips, but they did not ask for kisses. Her teeth were pretty and transparent, but they were incapable of snapping. Her greatest charm was her fresh complexion, to be described, in Diderot's phase, as " a bowl of milk in which floated rose leaves."[1] Her skin had the same tint as that of the Duchesse de Longueville, a shade so rare that comparison is almost impossible, for few can equal it. With all these graces, not to forget a nose that was witty, animated, and full of life (another perfection), her features bore a slightly astonished and childish air. Greuze depicted the same look on the faces of the little women he painted. Perhaps the creator of the " Village Bride," and the " Girl with the broken pitcher," caught sight of her that day as he crawled from the ignoble kennels where he endeavoured to whip his imagination into inspirations of innocence. Her hair, somewhat curly, crowned her seductive face in a ravishing manner. It was difficult to distinguish between a slight playful malice, and smiles of goodwill. Only the respect due to her dignity, and the proud way in which she carried herself, barred compliments to her beauty. She was already a great lady, and the most audacious person could not fail to recognise the fact.

Unfortunately, in addition to an ungainly waist, her hands did not correspond with the beauty of her features. The fingers were too large, the nails flat and square. An opportunity to examine them presented itself when she pulled off her gloves to sign her name. Her feet, too, lacked fineness of proportion. Feet and hands had been cast in a coarse mould. But what do such details matter ? She thought them pretty, and her smile converted her

[1] Diderot uses this expression in speaking of the features of the Flemish Mademoiselle d'Ette, a friend of Madame d'Epinay. Her soul, however, was far from being as white as her skin.

friends to her own belief. Everything in this world—even beauty—is more or less an illusion.

This young bride was the only daughter of Monsieur Bernard, formerly a notary at Lyons, and afterwards a Receiver of Taxes at Paris. The happy bridegroom was Monsieur Récamier, a Parisian banker.

Jeanne Françoise Julie Adélaïde Bernard was born at Lyons, December 4, 1777. According to the testimony of Madame Récamier's niece, her father was not a man of the brightest intelligence, but decidedly handsome. His wife was not less gifted by nature. Madame Bernard was a lively and bustling blonde, a coquette whose " devilry," not suffering from excess of naïveté, blossomed delightfully under the paternal eye of her husband ; for, in this, as in many other households, Madame Bernard was the master. The notary had but the right to bow to the desires of his wife, to take her instructions and to act upon them, to applaud everything she said, and to say " amen " to everything she wished.

In that period of leisure and inertia preceding the Revolution, France possessed a great number of idlers ; younger sons without money, youths who perpetually searched for employment they were not keen to find, men who did not know in what manger to feed, and whose necessity forced them to live with any family that would give them welcome. Every rich house, every comfortable dwelling, had one or more of these parasites, who found under its roof " a good supper, and a good lodging,"—and much else. The official parasite was generally an abbé. Molière's Tartuffe was not an abbé ; but he belonged to the same fraternity. Diderot's *Neveu de Rameau* gives an idea of the duties of this profession. Some of the idlers were honest men, if it be possible to call honest those who hid their dignity in their pocket and sold their independence for a bed and a meal. George Sand, in the history of her life, draws the portrait of a parasite who was in other respects honest. He lived with Madame Dupin, widow of the farmer-general Francueil, the former lover of Madame d'Epinay. In Madame d'Epinay's own house there were always a few

men and women who passed for friends. The unpleasant Mademoiselle d'Ette, who meddled with everybody's concerns in order to further her own business, was a fair specimen of the race. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was another, but of a different pattern. The parasite lived at the expense of friendship. Like all idlers he was gluttonous of ease. He undertook a thousand little domestic duties, and carried out the various commissions of the household as a return for the hospitality shown him. He also paid for his lodging in verbosity, and wit—when he had any. In the households of the eighteenth century, when embroiled by the frolics of master or mistress, there often existed a latent hostility, a mute antagonism. This formed the ideal atmosphere for the parasite. He was able to become really useful, even indispensable. He acted as the buffer state between two hostile powers. He weakened the shock of conjugal quarrels and animosities. His presence was sufficient to suppress recriminations which, otherwise, would have broken forth in full day ; and he saved the situation in front of the servants. Without him the *tête-à-tête* in the dining-room would have become unbearable. He became the confidant, and, to some extent, the adviser of one, sometimes of both parties. His interest was to create a kind of semi-understanding, which he took care should always remain incomplete, so that his presence and good services might be continually necessary. The parasite can hardly be called a fifth wheel in the coach, but rather a part of the household of the old régime indispensable to its peace and quietude.

This person, decorated with the title of friend, had his weaknesses, his vices, and his passions. He was often more than the simple friend of Madame. In such a case the affairs of the household were even serenely happy. The friend soon became the master. Monsieur, delighted to find peace under his roof, did not enquire too deeply into the means that procured it. He was relieved of the cares of amusing, petting, distracting, and airing Madame. That was enough. Little importance was attached to moral failings, which

might more truly be called weaknesses. Morality hardly entered into the question. Delivered from the yoke of his wife, the husband submitted without a murmur to the yoke of his friend.

Monsieur Bernard, at once good-natured and weak, endured the sway of Monsieur Simonard. A companion from boyhood, Simonard had gained so strong an ascendency that he was more master than the master. When Monsieur and Madame Bernard left Lyons in 1784, Monsieur Simonard took good care to follow such hospitable people. Madame Bernard was far from foolish, and she did not allow her beauty to interfere with a very practical co-operation between business and business-men. In some way she had made the acquaintance of Monsieur de Calonne.[1] In those days a nobleman, a great lord, a prime minister, hardly associated with a woman of the middle-class, the wife of a provincial notary. Monsieur de Calonne suddenly discovered much merit in Madame Bernard, or in her husband. The minister came to the conclusion that such notarial qualities could not be allowed to rust in the provinces. In order to have handy a man he had never met, he named Bernard receiver of taxes in Paris. Nothing justified the appointment. A minister, however, is like a king. He has only to say: "Such is our pleasure."

Whilst the household was being transported to Paris, Julie, who was now seven, was sent to an aunt at Villefranche. There she commenced an apprenticeship to her future profession—to call it by its real name—of a woman to be adored. She inspired, in a boy of her own age, a passion as platonic as those of her "innumerable admirers" of the future. Such childish passions are more serious than are generally believed. A child, when he has a heart,

[1] Charles Alexandre de Calonne (1734-1802), according to Carlyle, "a man of indisputable genius, even fiscal genius." In 1783-87 he was comptroller-general of finance. His only study to please the Court, he reversed the economical policy of Turgot and Necker, and brought about a deficit of 112,000,000 francs. He was exiled and ultimately died in poverty.

feels with a vehemence and intensity little suspected by his elders, who, as they grow up, forget these depths.

Juliette reciprocated the affection of young Humblot, and she must be praised for admitting the fact. She often spoke of it, and never forgot the incident. Was her heart really touched? It is possible. In infancy every feeling is pure, disinterested, natural, and true. Later, much later, the heart becomes worn by the very exercise of its faculties. It is scorched by the fire of those other hearts with which it has come into contact. This applies particularly to the heart of ice.

Perhaps this childish passion simply awakened the vanity of Juliette, inspiring the thought: "How beautiful I must be to be loved already?" In the evening twilight, Madame Récamier found a retrospective joy in recounting the story of her beauty and the successes of her childhood. For a coquette it was no negligible success, and she was careful to inscribe the name of young Humblot upon the list which, little by little, became the "dictionary" of her admirers.

When the ladies of a bygone world indulged in their loves to such a degree as to provoke scandal, they were sent to a convent.[1] Juliette's innocent idyll was not the reason why she went to the convent of La Déserte at Lyons. She was placed under the care of the nuns to finish her education.

Like many girls, she loved convent life. One of her aunts was a nun, and perhaps her affection as a niece accounts for her partiality. When she heard that she must leave La Déserte she wept. Her parents, however, called her to Paris, and, in company with her aunt, she made the journey.

From that time she lived with her father, her mother, and their friend Simonard. Her education was their chief interest. She was taught the piano, the harp, and

[1] For example, the Duchesse de Stainville. Her husband, having good reason to be jealous of his cousin Lauzun, got an order from Louis XV., and shut her up in a convent at Nancy.

singing, and soon showed a talent that made her an amateur of some distinction. Later, when she was one of the rulers of the world of Paris, all the women wished to follow her example and play the piano. If it amused them, there is nothing more to be said. Unfortunately they forced their daughters to the same instrument, and thus Madame Récamier became the innocent cause of the martyrdom of a crowd of unhappy girls. Fashion decreed that no girl could be properly educated without a knowledge of the piano. She might not have the slightest musical talent. No matter, the stupid parents inflicted on her the torture of eight hours' piano practice every day. This fashion continued until the end of the Second Empire. Fathers and mothers never considered that there were more necessary things for their daughters to do than servilely to imitate those whose natural talents disposed them towards musical perfection. They never dreamed of allowing the girls to devote some of the hours wasted upon music to subjects such as literature, geography, history, housekeeping, cooking, social duties. The time would have been infinitely better employed.

Monsieur and Madame Bernard possessed a comfortable fortune, and, what is far rarer, knew how to enjoy their wealth. Instead of being stupidly wasteful, or still more stupidly economical, they judiciously spent their income. Next to the pleasure of doing good with their money, Monsieur and Madame Bernard liked to receive their friends, the chief joy for all people of intelligence. Madame Bernard surrounded herself with a circle in which her leisure passed like a dream.

The natives of Lyons are exceedingly exclusive. Monsieur Bernard's house was open by preference to men from his own province, and, at the beginning of the Revolution, many distinguished visitors crossed the threshold of No. 13, Rue des Saints-Pères. Lemontey,[1] who was unable

[1] Pierre Edouard Lemontey (1762-1826) born at Lyons, became a barrister. During the Monarchy he ardently supported Necker. Detesting the excesses of the revolutionary party as much as the

to hide his learning, and talked in the drawing-room like a professor on a platform; Camille Jordan,[1] an enthusiast with sincere convictions, but so provincial in his habits that the vulgar were unable to realise his distinction and wit. Without doubt they introduced Monsieur de la Harpe[2] to Madame Bernard. These men, with some recruits from the political world, including Barère,[3] gave to the salon a stamp of ease and peacefulness that political discussions were unable to suppress. Under the expiring monarchy it was considered one of the most agreeable drawing-rooms in Paris. Madame Bernard, always young, always alert, amiable, and slightly coquettish, knew mar-

abuses of the old régime, he had to live in Switzerland during the Terror. He then devoted himself to literature, and, although of independent fortune, sought the favours of Napoleon, who created him chief of a department of literary censorship. He wrote several histories and was received into the Institute in 1819. His parsimony was the subject of gossip, and indirectly caused his death. But he loved society, which sought his company, for it was said he could always rely upon three hundred and sixty invitations every year.

[1] Camille Jordan (1771-1821). After the fall of Lyons, in 1793, took refuge in England, becoming acquainted with Fox, Erskine and Lord Holland. Elected to the Council of the Five Hundred, he attacked the Directory and the Consulate, retiring to Germany. Ennobled by Louis XVIII., his career was one of opposition and moderate liberalism.

[2] Frédéric César de la Harpe (1754-1838) was educated as a barrister and practised at Berne. He became tutor to the two sons of Catherine II. of Russia. His enthusiasm for the principles of the Revolution led to his disgrace, and he left St. Petersburg in 1793. When his pupil Alexander visited Paris in 1814 as Emperor of Russia, La Harpe received him, and had much influence over the monarch. After the Congress of Vienna he settled in Lausanne.

[3] Bertrand Barère de Vieuzac (1755-1841) was originally a barrister of Toulouse, and then tutor to Pamela, the natural daughter of Philippe Egalité. He voted for the death of Louis XVI., "without appeal to the people, and without delay," declaring that "the tree of liberty could not grow if it were not watered by the blood of kings." Known as the "Anacreon of the guillotine," owing to his graceful and poetical oratory, he was the most unscrupulous member of the committee of Public Safety. He escaped the scaffold, and re-entered political life as a secret agent for Napoleon. Becoming a royalist, he was banished for life in 1815 as a regicide. He lived in Brussels until 1830, when he was allowed to return to Paris and receive a pension from Louis Philippe.

vellously well the arts of attracting, retaining, and grouping round her men whose sentiments were often in conflict. Her skill is the more admirable because the period was one of over-excited passion. In spite of her youth the little Juliette was admitted to the circle, as her future friend, Germaine Necker,[1] had been allowed to enter her parents' salon. Worldly lessons helped to complete her education. At an age when most women have everything to learn, her precocious intelligence had been formed, and she made use of it in a marvellous way.

As a notary, Monsieur Bernard dealt with money. Now, as a man of finance, he endeavoured to surround himself with bankers. Their interests closely bordered upon the domain of politics, and, finding politicians gathered together in the salon, these bankers were not hard to bring together. After seeing Madame Bernard they did not require a second invitation. The most assiduous frequenter of the house—he came from Lyons and was acquainted with the family in earlier days—was Monsieur Récamier, the son of a merchant who sold hats in his native city. Jacques Rose Récamier had commenced life as his father's commercial traveller. Active and intelligent, with a gift for talking, he succeeded in his profession, and entered into business relations with several of the Parisian banking houses. Having gained a footing in one of them he quickly mastered the complicated details of its working, the mechanism that controls the circulation of money and the public credit. In spite of his expensive tastes Récamier had enough strength of character to refrain from waste. Putting all

[1] Germaine Necker, more famous as Madame de Staël (1766—1817), daughter of Jacques Necker, the financier and statesman. The Neckers were of mixed Irish and English descent, and settled in Geneva. When Edward Gibbon went to Lausanne in 1757 he became attached to the daughter of the Protestant minister at Crassy. But although Susanne Curchod refused several offers for his sake the future historian could not obtain his father's consent, so "sighed as a lover, but obeyed as a son." Mademoiselle Curchod then married Necker, and became the mother of Germaine. Gibbon's behaviour seems to have been rather heartless, but his unkindness was forgiven.

such weaknesses aside, one day he himself founded a bank. Directed with activity the House of Récamier prospered. The young banker was not only intelligent in business; he had that pronounced taste for the fashionable world quite indispensable to all who wish for success, no matter what their position may be. Récamier's inclination for the *demi-monde* damaged him a little. He had tact, and in person was correct, even distinguished, which helped rapidly to bring him to the front. Amongst the bankers of Paris he was appreciated and liked. Tall and well-made, with thick fair hair and large blue eyes, he was unquestionably a handsome man. He talked well, and was not blind to the gift. He garnished his conversation with lines from Virgil and Horace, which had escaped the usual shipwreck the classics undergo in later life. These waifs had become fixed in his memory as firmly as seaweed to a rock, and he continually served them up to his amazed listeners. In his circle Latin was not an article of current consumption, and Récamier obtained the reputation of much learning. He enjoyed life in every way. He was contented with himself and contented with his friends, who recognised in him two rare qualities. Firstly, that he was invariably light-hearted; secondly, that he was always generous and ready to be of help—not only to his friends, more often a sign of vanity and egoism rather than the mark of a soft heart, but also towards his relatives. He was a Providence for "an army of nephews." He received them, took them into his office, and launched them in business.

Such an uncle is not often encountered. Récamier was the uncle of a fairy tale. He did not delay becoming the husband in a fairy tale, such a husband as is rarely to be found.

For some years young Juliette was in the habit of meeting Monsieur Récamier under her parents' roof. She received from him presents, sweets, "the most beautiful dolls." Then, when Monsieur and Madame Bernard told her that the amiable banker had asked for her hand in marriage, she could not have been much surprised.

At fifteen or sixteen years of age a young girl, even when she has seen much of the world, can hardly be expected to draw much distinction between one man and another, or to gauge with any accuracy their intelligence, their wit, their good qualities, or their outward value. Incapable of discriminating between gold and gilt, between diamond and paste, she may well ascribe wit to a fool. With men of riper age she is not more expert. Besides, at that epoch, there was not much apparent difference between a young man and his senior. Both had cleanly-shaven features, both powdered their hair or wore wigs. A man's accessories, his frame, the more or less elegant cut of his clothes, the beauty of his hair, the luxury of his house, these would be of infinitely greater importance in her eyes. Thus Juliette was able to contemplate without aversion a project which, considering the difference in their ages, might otherwise have been disposed of with the briefest consideration. She was fifteen, and he was forty-two! But such unequal marriages were the fashion. A man gave his wife rank and fortune, and provided that she behaved with outward discretion, and concealed any liaison which might graft itself on to a union which offended commonsense, he remained content. Conforming to such an understood law, Monsieur and Madame Bernard cannot be judged so culpable as we should deem them to-day. They presented as husband to their daughter, *tempestiva viro*, to quote Horace, *jam matura viro*, to quote Virgil, a fresh rose to a man slightly worn. As will be seen later on, there were on both sides exceptional circumstances in this union, and they make it very difficult to arrive at a just opinion.

The marriage took place at the beginning of the Reign of Terror, on the day of Marat's triumph.

Upon the return from the Hôtel de Ville a small and private reception was held at the house of the Bernards. The peril of the moment obliged them to confine their invitations to a few friends from Lyons. If a fête was given it must have been very discreet. Then the happy husband conducted Juliette to his home, No. 12, Rue du Mail. In former days

he had given her dolls, now she became his own plaything.

Madame Lenormant, niece to Madame Récamier, who afterwards devoted several volumes to the glory of her illustrious aunt, does not tell us whether any religious sanction was given to the marriage. Probably the religious marriage was dispensed with. Apart from the fact that it would have been dangerous to demand a priestly benediction, which could only have been given in secret, they were living under the Terror, and the banker was not audacious in character. Récamier had very particular reasons to dispense with the religious rite, despite his profession of Catholicism. The point is a delicate one, but it cannot be ignored.

Récamier, for there was veritably a Monsieur Récamier, as there was also a Monsieur Geoffrin, never claimed the rights which marriage gave him. "The lien," wrote Madame Lenormant, "was apparent only. Madame Récamier received from her husband but his name. This may seem astonishing, but all who knew Monsieur and Madame Récamier intimately attest to the fact. Monsieur Récamier's affection for his wife was paternal. He treated as a daughter the young and innocent child who carried his name, whose beauty charmed his eyes, and whose celebrity flattered his vanity." Then Madame Lenormant adds: "The affection which is the true felicity and dignity of a wife was missing. She was neither wife nor mother, and her heart, eager for tenderness and devotion, sought food to assuage this need of love in the homage of passionate admiration expressed in language pleasing to the ears."[1]

Madame Lenormant does not endeavour to explain the facts. To-day the reasons for this discreet reserve have vanished, and we can try to penetrate the mysteries of so singular a union. Most authors have glided over the subject as lightly as possible. As we are told, by Madame Lenormant herself, that "Monsieur Récamier was unhappily a man of light morals," why did he neglect a wife of

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 120.

such youth and beauty? Without outraging the domestic hearth with an indiscreet and unhealthy curiosity, the biographer must enter into the discussion of certain details which invite the industry of the historian. There is a double explanation of this singular state of things.

The first is one that cannot be treated here, but I am not able to escape a reference which must be quickly dealt with. Quite recently science has investigated the "case of Madame Récamier," and the result appears in a technical work written by a specialist.[1]

Afterwards came the rumour, which circulated during her lifetime, that she had married her natural father. This story was generally spread. Madame Cavaignac, mother of General Godefroid Cavaignac, relates it in her remarkable memoirs. This fact explains not only the amicable friendship which existed between husband and wife, but also Madame Lenormant's insistence that Monsieur Récamier acted as a *father* to his wife, whom he treated as his *daughter*.

Evidently supposing that Madame Lenormant knew the truth (if such was the truth), she was not the person to proclaim aloud a story that carried irreparable damage to the reputation and virtue of her aunt's mother, as well as a like damage to the posthumous reputation of Monsieur Bernard. She allows it to be understood, perhaps in order to demonstrate that she knew everything and wished to say nothing, that Madame Bernard had been a coquette. She recognises that Madame Bernard obtained from Monsieur de Calonne her husband's nomination as a receiver of taxes in Paris. This presupposes that Monsieur de Calonne was under some particular obligation to Madame Bernard. He was a nobleman infatuated with his gentility. Yet he appointed a provincial notary, without experience in administration, to a responsible post, at the moment when the Marshal de Ségur, minister of war, had ordered that no officer should receive an appointment without at least four quarters of nobility in his descent. Whatever may have been these

[1] See Dr. Cabanès. *Cabinet secret de l'histoire*, second series.

obligations, the minister acquitted himself in the usual manner by making the gift of a public employment. It is therefore not rash to imagine that Madame Bernard had been a coquette, even more than a coquette. The total effacement of her husband in his own house is a slight guide to the truth. We know, for Madame Lenormant tells us, that Madame Bernard "attached the highest value to exterior advantages." Would she have attached so high a price had she been alone to admire the advantages? It is hardly probable. Did her husband ask for them? This poor man, who played such an insignificant part in his wife's life, did not count for much in the household; not because "his intelligence was small"—women appreciate this negative quality which assures their domination—but because "his character was soft and feeble." These defects women never pardon. They like to feel the bridle, the hard hand, the spur, the whip, good reasons why a husband should be respected and loved. Monsieur Bernard, "soft and feeble," could not be loved, especially by an independent woman who trod the path of a coquette. She made him a victim.

Madame Bernard was fickle and loved pleasure, like the great ladies whose toilettes she attempted to imitate. Her principles were easy, being those of her time. She had no insurmountable passion for her husband. There was nothing to stop her from indulging in a caprice, or a contraband passion.

Without any doubt Récamier knew the Bernards at Lyons, though Madame Lenormant is silent upon the subject. She limits herself to the remark that "he was forty-two years old when he asked for the hand of Juliette Bernard, whom he had watched for two or three years developing into a marvellous beauty." Récamier was therefore an old friend of the family, and he continued at Paris the relationship commenced at Lyons. Bernard, thanks to the worldly intelligence of his wife, had exchanged the unassuming office of a country solicitor for the fat post of a tax collector in the capital. Récamier, thanks to his own capacity, was

no longer a modest commercial traveller in hats, but the head of an important banking establishment. These plebeians therefore did not condescend in continuing the acquaintance under such changed circumstances. But we can understand that for the sake of Monsieur and Madame Bernard, as well as in the interest of Juliette, the story of their more than friendly intercourse should have been kept secret. Récamier was married to his daughter He heaped toys upon her, gave her " the most beautiful dolls," simply because she was more than the daughter of an old friend. Madame Bernard was able to assure him that the marriage could never be other than a marriage in legal form and name, and this reason settled an affair which seemed otherwise in opposition to the ordinary laws of mankind. At forty years of age, and after a somewhat dissipated career, Récamier was not altogether cold to love. He continued his life of a butterfly young man about town, exactly as he had lived before his marriage. The arrangement was not directed by the highest morality, but it was a safe method of sheltering his daughter under his own roof. In the eyes of the world he treated her as a pretty doll who did him honour. At the same time he had a charming companion, whose youth and beauty would brighten the sadness and melancholy of his declining days. At first the situation would be somewhat delicate, but he was a man of intelligence, and would come through it safely. The beautiful Juliette could not but recognise an affection so perfectly disinterested. She easily pardoned the mysteries of her husband's conduct for the sake of the luxury he gave in his household.

Indeed, Récamier offered to his young companion all the compensations of money and riches. At first these extravagances were restrained, for, under the Terror, any sign of wealth was dangerous. The only distraction the newly-married banker allowed himself was to watch the guillotine at work, a pleasure he could hardly ask his young wife to share. Much later he made a curious excuse to his niece for this odd pastime. " I wished to become familiar with the end that certainly awaited me, and I prepared myself by seeing

others die." It is a fact that many of the tax receivers, Monsieur de Laborde and Lavoisier for example, as well as bankers like the two brothers Tassin, mounted the scaffold. Récamier could hardly doubt that his fortune would mark him as a victim for the revolutionary tribunals. But did he really gaze at others in their death agony merely to learn how to die? There is no need for such lessons. The moment comes, and we must submit—gracefully or regretfully, it is true, for, as Henri Lavedan says, there is a right way—but all the same depart we must. I have never heard it said that any one, even a banker, was able to escape this bill upon the day of settlement. To be a banker does not require much heroism, and there is no need to be astonished at Récamier's method of preparation. Every man is something of a coward, particularly if he wishes to preserve his cash. Let us believe that Récamier attended the revolting spectacle to advertise himself as one of the supporters of the guillotine, to spread abroad the impression that he shared the views of the men who ruled at the moment, and to escape the denunciations of spies and thus distract attention from his wealth; for he was an extremely rich man. "At the end of the Terror he was in full possession of great financial resources," writes Madame Lenormant.

Very probably the peaceful banker was conducted to these sanguinary sights by the revolutionists themselves. The honest man who, like Panurge, feared nothing, "except danger," could also say with that hero, "I am somewhat cowardly by nature." Provoked by fear, avarice, and a faint heart, his conduct does not merit much esteem. The presence of the trembling banker in front of the guillotine was on his part a tacit approbation of its excesses. One thing is difficult to understand. In his later life he had not the modesty to conceal this shameful incident of his past career. He could not have been wholly compelled by the terrorists.[1]

[1] Perhaps I give a little too much importance to this side of his character. Récamier tried to extenuate his behaviour in several "documents." He makes an avowal to his wife in a letter written

However, the day came when society, in order to preserve its own existence, sent to the scaffold the revolutionists, one by one until the last was executed. On the ninth of "Thermidor" the tyrants who had ruled France passed away, and the banker's attitude changed. After the execution of Robespierre, Lebas, Couthon, Saint-Just, Hanriot, and their sixty-six companions in death, whose virtues the "Thermidoriens" failed to appreciate, the overworked guillotine was allowed to rest. The orgy of blood was ended. Amidst moral and material ruins, social life built itself up afresh. Soon business and pleasure engrossed the whole of Paris. Returning to his banking-house, trying to enjoy life after living so long in the fear of death, Récamier watched his worldly prosperity wax fatter and fatter. Everything had to be reconstituted afresh, credit in particular. The gambling in stocks reached a frightful pitch. Récamier had a genius for such dealings, together with a rare breadth of outlook. He succeeded marvellously. The military contracts were an inexhaustible mine of wealth for the bankers. Thanks to a more than ordinary speculating instinct, to a desire for combination, to other means not necessary to study too closely—so large a fortune could not have been made honestly—Récamier, with his powerful influence, obtained very advantageous contracts which filled his coffers to the brim. A short while after the triumph of the "Thermidoriens," fortune had crowned efforts which would probably not have been crowned by Monsieur de Montyon.[1] The Récamier bank was the strongest in the capital.

Madame Récamier was the most beautiful woman in Paris. There was much competition; for instance, the

September 3, 1811. "You know that my character has not always been so firm. I admire the quality in some men without showing it myself." His knowledge of the classics had not taught him the good precept:

*Tu ne cede malis, sed contra fortior ito.*

And also:

*Fortiaque adversis opponite pectora rebus.*

[1] Montyon (1733-1820) who founded the "Prix de Vertu," annually awarded by the Institute.

*Masquerier, pinx.*

*W. Ward, sculpt.*

MADAME TALLIEN

" citoyenne " Tallien, formerly Marquise de Fontenay, soon Madame Cabarrus, later Princesse de Chimay, was then in the full maturity of her brilliant and insolent beauty. Her type was that of a Spanish brunette, and her triumph was more startling than the discreet charm of the much younger Juliette. Then there was Madame Hainguerlot, who courted authors and was thought a woman of spirit. She knew that the easiest way to gain a reputation for intelligence is to flatter those who have it. Madame Hamelin was admired for her mulatto attractions, which her friends were kind enough to qualify by calling creole. Madame Beauharnais was a true creole. She was trying to find a protector to replace Barras,[1] who had ceased to be interested in her. Madame Radet owed all her fascination to her clothes, and all her beauty to her hats. There were others who might be mentioned for their more or less imaginary perfections. Not one could boast the dazzling carnations and distinguished grace of the young " citoyenne " Récamier.

However, at the end of 1794, the year of " Thermidor," and during 1795, which witnessed the expiring authority of the convention, Madame Récamier seldom appeared except in some of the banking salons, and also at the then fashionable public balls. She was chiefly seen whilst taking the air in an open carriage. Her charming features, always in the most agreeable repose, caught the fancy of a crowd that had

[1] Paul Francois Jean Nicolas Barras (1755-1829) a man of noble birth, after a military career, entered politics, and voted for the death of Louis XVI. He was actively engaged in the military arrangements of the republic, and made the acquaintance of Bonaparte during the siege of Toulon. Assisting in the overthrow of Robespierre he became one of the five directors who acted as the executive of the French Republic. He did not forget the young artillery officer, probably arranged his marriage with Josephine Beauharnais, and may have been responsible for his selection as head of the army in Italy. Bonaparte overturned the Directory, and the political career of Barras was practically at an end. But, through the army contracts, he had acquired a large fortune, and was free to indulge in the luxurious immorality for which he was notorious. He intrigued against the Empire in favour of the Bourbons, but after the Restoration Louis XVIII. refused to receive him.

not witnessed so graceful and restful a sight for many years.

The government of the Directory allowed more scope to social life. Under the constitutional guarantees of the year III. the to-morrow became somewhat more assured. There was no longer the fear of the guillotine for those who possessed a good horse or a fine dress. So the pleasure resorts gradually became crowded.

The capital of France offered a strange spectacle. The Parisians lived in the streets, and in the public places. Pleasure ruled supreme, and, as is only just, the women presided over pleasure. In other words, it may be said they governed Paris. This has happened at various periods of history, but never was female influence so openly advertised. It was the women's revenge for the guillotine. They exchanged death for life, torments for joys, prison for liberty. A new world, formed from the old fragments, asserted its wish to live and to be happy. No pleasure could sufficiently satisfy its desires. A thousand lights shone in the ball-rooms. Through the streets carriages rolled to the jingle of silver bells. The intoxication of dance music, the transports of the valse, the feverish anxiety of gambling, replaced the terror of domiciliary visits and the horrors of prison, or the fever of war and the sorrows of the emigration. Amusement was carried to an extreme.

Madame Récamier was one of the most prominent figures in the world which amused itself. Already to some degree queen of the Chaussée d'Antin, she frequented all the banking houses, Tourton, Perregaux, Hainguerlot, Séguin. The young woman went everywhere. After her portrait by Ducreux had been admired in the Salon of 1796, Paris flocked to admire the girl herself at the lectures of the Lyceum, where La Harpe, the old friend of her husband and her mother, had no more assiduous pupil. To her great satisfaction the illustrious professor gave her a seat on the platform next to his own. She sat facing the public. Perhaps this was one reason why La Harpe's lectures were so sought after. The lecture over, the audience dispersed

to see the young woman in the Champs Elysées, where Mademoiselle Lange, Madame Tallien, and other fashionable beauties " glittered like soft transparencies in the crowd." [1] Again she could be watched at the Feydeau concerts, which gave the finest music in Paris, at the open-air fêtes and entertainments at Waux-hall, Mousseaux, and Tivoli, at the balls of the Hôtel Thélusson, the Hôtel d'Aligre, and the Hôtel Biron. Manners and tastes were depraved. Envy and selfishness were rampant, although covered with a brilliant enamel of luxury and wealth. Pleasure was the only god. " Those who do not possess mountains of bank-notes, or unlimited gold, who are not agents, merchants, or highway robbers, are no longer able to live," wrote Fontanes [2] to Joubert. [3] Yet Madame Récamier dressed as simply as the most needy emigrant who had returned with an empty pocket. At other moments she entered into competition with the *deshabille* of Madame Hamelin, the grand-priestess of the *sans chemise* mode. At the balls she danced better, and oftener, than her rivals. In the street she could be recognised from afar, " beautiful as the day, always wearing a tiny linen fichu arranged in the same manner." [4] Her beauty and her charm sealed her triumph. Like a monarch, with an amiable curtsey she thanked the crowd for its admiration, and generously distributed smiles of recognition.

The most frequented balls were those held in public. Every one attended them, even men and women of the highest circles. But there was no merit in going to dances where entrance would be had by payment. Since Barras had been created a member of the Executive Government, he had given several dancing parties. It became necessary

[1] Le Miroir, Germinal, year VI.

[2] Louis, marquis de Fontanes (1757-1821), poet and politician.

[3] G. Pailhès. *Du nouveau sur Joubert*, p. 8. Joseph Joubert (1734-1824), moralist and philosopher, a faithful member of Madame de Beaumont's salon, in which he introduced Fontanes and Chateaubriand.

[4] Madame de Chastenay, *Mémoires*, Vol. I., p. 303. Madame Récamier had already discovered that simplicity is the wisest artifice of the coquette. At the same time it became her. We can, therefore, dispense with an exaggerated admiration for this artful simplicity.

to visit Barras. So her husband took her to Barras' house.[1] Read what Benjamin Constant wrote about it when he became older and more scrupulous.[2] Madame Récamier visited the Lauzun of the Directory.

Did she go there but once, as declares Madame Lenormant, who energetically protests against her aunt's participation in the society of the Directory? Did she go upon this single occasion, because "Monsieur Récamier wished his young wife to accept the invitation which had been addressed to her, as it was likely to be of use to him in business?" Madame Récamier, in her conversations with her niece, did not boast of her intimacy with the circle of the Luxembourg, for she afterwards mixed exclusively with princes, dukes, statesmen, and men of celebrity. But unquestionably she attended the fêtes of the Vicomte de Barras. She admitted making one visit, for it was impossible later to hide entirely the compromising fact. Over this has been modestly thrown the mantle of charity. She sacrificed herself, and risked her reputation, in order to beg from the voluptuous minister the pardon of an exiled priest, who had re-entered France without legal authorisation. The fiction was cleverly invented to please her royalist friends. The sacrifice of her repugnance, the danger of appearing as an enemy to the Government, the risks of spoiling her husband's business, had as object the freedom of a wretched priest she had never seen. This was devotion in all its sublimity. It was a real self-sacrifice of every material and moral interest. And then to reap the thorns of calumny! Her supporters were such gossips that there is really no contradiction between what they saw and what they afterwards wrote. Contemporary newspapers, as Madame Lenormant admits with a certain amount of pleasure, chronicled the fête and published a quatrain improvised for Madame Récamier at supper. It is not a very well

[1] "It was not the place for a woman, particularly a young woman. The people one met there were neither good to look at nor to know." *Mémoires d'une inconnue*, p. 112.

[2] *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à Madame Récamier*, p. 339.

made verse, but remains in evidence as a piece of flattery. Admitting an attendance at one ball, her friends forgot the evident contradiction with the contemporary gazettes and society chronicles. In declaring that she made the visit to obey her husband, they envelop the victim in an atmosphere of sacrifice and resignation. She is almost created a martyr. An aureole is becoming to a young and pretty head. "Cymodoce in the circus," Chateaubriand would have thought and written. The pardon of an *émigré*, a priest to add to the effect, was the reason for this saint's self-abnegation. In the eyes of the royalists it formed the climax to the sublimity of her devotion.

Madame Lenormant allowed that her aunt went to Barras once, but once only, and she dates the visit at the close of the Directory in the spring of 1799, before Bonaparte put his shoulder to the scaffolding of Government, and roughly overturned it. This is a ready way of allowing us to understand that Madame Récamier's condescension towards the Vicomte de Barras was accidental and could not have been repeated.

The calculations were clever and well made. Unfortunately other witnesses have spoken. We know that Madame Récamier visited the salons of the Luxembourg from the first year of the Directory. Arsène Houssaye, who had every indulgence for Madame Tallien, said that Madame Récamier "was one of the neo-Greeks who escaped half-naked, but clothed in modesty, from the ruins of a bleeding Pompeii." And he added: "I know from a good source that Madame Récamier frequented the salons of the Directory, and corseted in the fortress of her virtue, did not disdain to dance in cotillion with Madame Tallien. . . ." Where then did Madame Récamier go, if it was not to the fashionable gatherings of the hour? I know very well that at Longchamps Madame Récamier appeared in an open carriage, clothed in the style of Aspasia, almost in a "peplum," her sandalled feet on a tiger's skin, her hair in ringlets which curled over a snowy neck touched by the pale March sun. Her half-covered arms adorned with cameos, she passed

amidst the "incroyables," and the "muscadins" like an idol. But neither at Longchamps, nor at the church of Saint Roch, did she gain the reputation of being the most beautiful dancer during the Directory. I will borrow a phrase from her biographer: "For several years she passionately loved dancing, and when she entered the world, she made it a point of honour to be the first to arrive at a ball, and the last to go."[1]

It may be argued that Arsène Houssaye was but a second-hand witness, although he writes: "I know from a good source." Let us take the evidence of a witness who actually saw what he relates, and of whose good faith there cannot be the slightest suspicion. "I have never forgotten another kind of surprise experienced during the first year of the Directory. One day I found myself at the foot of the staircase leading to the apartments occupied by the citizen Barras. Three ladies entered and slowly went up. Their beauty, the elegance of their dress, which, according to the fashion of that time, veiled their charms without hiding them, reminded me of the three Graces in mythology. I thought I saw them still, long after they had disappeared. I was told later that these ladies were Mesdames Tallien, Bonaparte, and Récamier, and that they habitually came to give lustre to the salons of the Directory. This surprised me, for I had always taken him for the most austere of republicans."[2]

The story destroys Madame Lenormant's legend that her aunt was absent from Barras' fêtes. Probably in these rooms she made the acquaintance of Madame Tallien, who was the mistress of the Director, and whom she received in turn.[3] Sainte-Beuve, who canonised his subjects in so amiable a manner, wrote that "the world Madame Récamier traversed was very mixed and very ardent. She did not scruple to tempt it." And he adds: "to be exact, I must

[1] Arsène Houssaye. *Notre Dame de Thermidor*, p. 455-456.
[2] Besnard. *Souvenirs d'un nonagénaire*, p. 146.
[3] Aug. Barbier. *Souvenirs personnels et silhouettes contemporaines*, p. 309.

*Photo: Artigue*

MADAME TALLIEN AND MADAME RÉCAMIER

*After the painting by Marguerite Gérard in the Bordeaux Museum*

lower the standard a trifle, and for a moment take Madame Récamier down from the high ideal of Laura and Beatrice where it is customary to place her."[1] She soon understood, quicker than she was made to understand, that it was necessary to change the tone. The Consulate was beginning. When Bonaparte purged his wife's salon, Madame Récamier purged her own in a very discreet manner. Later, with a stroke of the pen, she obliterated this somewhat compromising past. Her friends joined her in forgetting it, but the historian has his duty to perform.

In his *Memoirs* Barras does not refer to Madame Récamier. There were not the same reasons why he should mention her as he mentioned Madame de Beauharnais, Madame de Tallien, or Madame de Staël. He says that other bankers' wives came to cajole military contracts from him.[2] Dying in 1829, he was not able to foresee that Madame Récamier would have renewed her friendship with the Verres of the Directory, and that—as the intimate of Montmorency, Chateaubriand, Noailles, and every one with a title or celebrity—she would endeavour to display her " white " convictions to the royalists who composed her tiny court.

However, Madame Récamier's graceful dancing fascinated everybody. Without doubt it must have been in the salons of the Luxembourg that she executed that famous " danse du schall " which Madame de Staël immortalised in the pages of *Corinne*, and which Madame de Krüdener borrowed for her heroine in her novel of *Valérie*.[3] Madame de Krüdener, who drew herself as Valérie, perhaps took Madame Récamier as her model. In a dance which was hardly a regulated and measured step, but rather a graceful pantomime, translating into gesture the transporting atmosphere of the

[1] Sainte-Beuve. *Causeries du lundi*, Vol. I. p. 126.

[2] " Barras was the centre of a very intimate group which included Bonaparte, Fréron, Tallien, etc., and Mesdames de Beauharnais, Tallien, Hamelin, a sister of Mirabeau—I have forgotten her name—and others. This circle had a double object, business and pleasure." La Revellière-Lépeaux. *Mémoires*, Vol. II., p. 24.

[3] " Madame Récamier's dance gave one the idea I have attempted to portray." Madame de Staël. *Corinne*.

music, her movements appeared still more supple. No corset bound her waist, and she was able to introduce some of the soft undulations of a serpent. She left to the displeasing Madame Hamelin not only the suggestion of a serpent, but also its venom. Poor Juliette knew the sting, for this biting tongue did not leave her unmolested.

But Madame Hamelin, with the lascivious grace of a half-caste from San Domingo, never attained in her dances that reserve—allied to a discreet voluptuousness—Madame Récamier possessed to so extreme a degree. Indeed her dancing urged an onlooker to remark to the Chevalier de Boufflers, an expert in such things :

" I have never seen any person dance better with her arms."

## CHAPTER II

IT was probably under Barras' roof that Madame Récamier first met the lady termed by Rivarol "the bacchante of the Revolution,"[1] Madame de Staël. The acquaintance soon developed into a solid friendship. When she became serious Madame Récamier became prudish. Her circle was select as well as royalist, and she blushed when she remembered that in her youth she had enjoyed a close relationship with the men and women of the Directory. She did not wish posterity to think that she had known Madame de Staël in the midst of those depraved dandies and disreputable women who gravitated towards Barras in the salons of the Luxembourg. If the "roi des pourris"[2] was director of the gay réunions, Necker's daughter was the directress. So Madame Récamier left a note evidently intended for publicity, and Madame Lenormant inserted it in the *Souvenirs et Correspondance*. She wrote so little that this document is worth attention. It gives a slightly romantic touch to a friendship probably formed at the Luxembourg under more natural conditions.

Monsieur Récamier wished his wife to have a summer

[1] The nickname was well-merited. The shameless behaviour of Madame de Staël during the Directory passed all belief. Mallet du Pan, a compatriot as well as a co-religionist, refers to a fête, at which she assisted, in the following words: "Madame de Staël lavished impudence and immorality; a most noisy joy distinguished this orgy." (Mallet du Pan, *Correspondance avec la cour de Vienne*, Vol. I., p. 223.) If Madame de Staël had possessed simply talent, and lacked the considerable income which was the chief reason why the cowardly world forgave the many scandals of her private life, it is possible that Madame Récamier would not have found her so sympathetic.

[2] Literally "king of 'rotters.'"

residence, and he took for her use the château of Clichy-la-Garenne, outside Paris. This property had belonged to the Duc de Lévis, and before him to Madame Dupin, wife of the farmer-general, with whom J. J. Rousseau had dined more than once,[1] and grandmother of George Sand. Récamier also desired to give his wife a town house, and amongst those he visited was No. 7 Rue du Mont-Blanc. It belonged to Monsieur Necker, and Madame de Staël, his daughter, wanted to sell it. Récamier became the purchaser, and Madame Lenormant says that "the negotiation of this sale was the origin of the friendship between Madame de Staël and Madame Récamier." Clearly Madame Récamier attached very great importance to the story of this intercourse, for she also wrote to Benjamin Constant on the same subject.[2]

"One day, I remember it as an epoch in my life, Monsieur Récamier came to Clichy with a lady he did not introduce to me by name. He left us together in the drawing-room in order to join other visitors in the park. This lady came to speak about the sale of her house. Her costume was strange. She wore a morning dress, and a little trimmed hat ornamented with flowers. I took her to be a foreigner. I was struck with the beauty of her eyes, and of her looks. I can hardly explain what I felt, but I was sure that I recognised, I might almost say guessed, her personality, when she said to me, with a bright and quick gaze, that she was delighted to meet me, and that Monsieur Necker, her father . . . At these words I knew her to be Madame de Staël! I did not hear the remainder of the sentence, I blushed, my confusion was extreme. I had recently been reading her *Letters on Rousseau*, which had passionately interested me. I revealed my feelings more in my looks than by words. At the same moment she intimidated yet attracted me. I felt at once that she was perfectly natural, and of a superior temperament. On

[1] J. J. Rousseau. "*Confessions*," Book VIII.

[2] *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à Madame Récamier*. Appendice: p. 341.

MADAME DE STAËL
*From the engraving by Hopwood after the portrait by Madame le Brun*

her part, her great eyes gazed on me with a curiosity full of goodwill. Her compliments would have appeared exaggerated and too direct, had they not slipped from her tongue in an unguarded manner, which gave her praises an irresistible seduction. My confusion did me no harm. She understood its reason. She said that she wished to see much of me upon her return to Paris from Coppet. She was but an apparition in my life, but she left a deep impression. The memory of Madame de Staël remained in my thoughts, for her ardent and strong character struck me forcibly."

This is well said, but it is perhaps not very exact. It is difficult to believe that Récamier introduced the daughter of Necker to his wife without naming her. Madame Récamier pretends that she did not recognise this visitor of importance who was left alone in so strange a manner with the mistress of the house. How are we to believe that Madame Récamier had never met Madame de Staël either at the rooms of Barras, or in the Champs-Elysées, at Longchamps, the theatres, the concerts, and the other public places of meeting ? Why should she alone, of all the world, not know at sight the famous ambassadress ? Madame de Staël must have seen before this meeting the woman whose beauty was so universally vaunted—her beauty only, let it be added, for the wickedness of jealous rivals called her shallow[1]—a woman who could not set her foot in the streets without being followed by a crowd.[2] She must have endeavoured to meet her, no impossible matter if she truly did not

[1] *Mémoires d'une inconnue*, p. 113.

[2] *Ibid.*—*Cf.* Kotzebue, *Souvenirs de Paris en* 1804 : " these appearances were actual events " (Benjamin Constant, *Lettres à Madame Récamier*, App. p. 329). Her taste in dress was possibly an assistance to this success. At this period she advertised herself by an extreme simplicity, sometimes too extreme if we are to believe an Englishman who chronicled his impressions of Paris. He writes : " One evening in the Champs-Elysées Madame Récamier appeared in a robe that rivalled those of the Garden of Eden. The Parisians, who are noticeable for their politeness towards women rather than by their scrupulous reserve, expelled this modern Eve from the Champs-Elysées, not with a flaming sword but with discreet hisses, and some gentle marks of a softened blame." (Sir John Carr : *Impressions*, quoted by A. Babeau, p. 175.) In the year V. two women

know her, in order to form some idea of her highly praised beauty. Madame Récamier had not the taste to pass unperceived in a crowd, unless with such modest care that she " obstinately wore a head-dress somewhat strange and distinctive, which at once distinguished her from every one else."[1]

Whatever the origin, Madame Récamier conceived for Madame de Staël a sincere friendship. Was it based upon esteem? Hardly, for Corinne had extremely free ideas concerning conduct. Was it a reciprocal attraction, born of the law of contrasts? Perhaps; but Madame de Staël's curiosity was equalled by Madame Récamier's desire to exhibit in her salon so celebrated a woman as Necker's daughter. In any case, on both sides, the friendship was true and lasting.

Monsieur Récamier bought the little house in the Rue du Mont-Blanc.[2] Outside and inside, he re-decorated it from basement to roof. The entire furnishing was placed in the hands of the most famous artists of that heavy and ungainly style which combined massive mahogany with bronze and gilt ornament. The fashion, and therefore esteemed beautiful, it was in reality only expensive. Nothing was spared. The former commercial traveller now acted like a great lord.

There was so much gossip about the marvels of the new home that it became the mode to visit the financier's home. Its exterior was not remarkable, and its dimensions exceedingly modest. When the government is not firmly

walked in the Champs-Elysées clothed simply in their modesty, a ray of sun, and some transparent gauze. The *Petite Poste* speaks of them. It is hardly probable that Madame Récamier was one of the two. Sir John Carr writes at second-hand of what he has been told. He was able to be deceived with the names. The women referred to in the *Petite Poste* were Madame Hamelin, and probably Madame Tallien. There is no doubt that Madame Récamier displayed herself, not only at home, but also in her carriage, in very slight costume. But she was so young!

[1] *Mémoires d'une inconnue*, p. 113.

[2] To-day Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin. The house has been replaced by a building numbered 66.

established, when the protests of the mob are yet being heard, when day after day men die of hunger by the side of unhappy wretches quarrelling in the gutter for the bones thrown to dogs, when the people are suffering, it is not wise to thrust in their faces the evidence that some men are able to grow rich through famine. The banker was prudent. His house had a frank, honest, and discreet appearance. It stood at the end of a well-kept court, gracefully built, fringed with small trees against the wall. A staircase led to the ground floor, beneath which were the kitchens. Mounting the steps the visitor entered a vestibule decked with shrubs, various kinds of plants, and rare flowers.[1] The doors were in massive mahogany. Soft Turkey carpets stifled every footstep in this temple,[2] and vague but discreet boudoir perfumes permeated the warm air. Thus Monsieur Récamier surrounded his rare blossom with a thousand comforts, and gained for himself a reputation that will

[1] " The staircases of her house resembled a garden." (Kotzebue, *Souvenirs de Paris en* 1804.) Kotzebue did not find that the luxury of the young woman had been exaggerated. " The draperies of her rooms are silk, the chimney-pieces of white marble, the clocks and pieces of furniture are ornamented in gilt bronze, the glasses are very large. The surroundings are extremely rich. I did not find luxury in the ordinary sense, but rather good taste, and extreme elegance in one or two apartments. An ante-chamber, two reception rooms, a bedroom, a dressing-room, and a dining-room make up her lodging. Certainly a little German actress would not have contented herself thus."

There was more luxury than the honest Kotzebue—dazzled by the beauty of the mistress of the house and not a little in love with her —wished to say. For the period it was much. Madame Lenormant, and we are able to believe her in this respect, grows enthusiastic over her aunt's furniture. " It was the finest example of the taste of her time." Evidently superb. The house of the banker Perregaux, also in the Rue du Mont-Blanc, alone was more sumptuous. At the present day, when luxury is quite common, there is hardly a middle-class home which has not its hall and staircase in marble ; there is not a little banker or well-to-do lawyer whose furniture is not richer than Madame Récamier's which, a century ago, was deemed a marvel.

[2] Reichardt. *Un hiver à Paris sous le Consulat*, p. 96.—*Cf.* Sir John Carr. *Impressions de voyage : les Anglais en France après la paix d'Amiens*, p. 175-177—Duchess d'Abrantès *Mémoires*, Vol. I., p. 327. —De Goncourt. *La Société française sous le Directoire*, p. 49-50.

always make him the most illustrious of bankers. Crossing the large vestibule paved with marble, on the right were two reception rooms, and the idol's bedroom, on the left her boudoir and bathroom—veritable gems. There was no need that this "merveilleuse" should be surrounded by marvels. When she deigned to walk in the street she was mobbed. The Englishman Trotter saw her at Frascati, "almost choked by a multitude of admirers, attracted by her delicious charm, her youthful air, and her simplicity."[1]

Mahogany was a luxury in furnishing because of its novelty. She revelled in its use. Windows and doors were made of the wood, and the walls panelled with it. The bed, the altar of the temple, was raised on a platform with two steps—also mahogany. Swans in bronze gilt, screwed to the varnished wood, held in their beaks gilt festoons of flowers, encompassing a bed which rose like a cloud. Light and transparent draperies fell from the baldaquin to the right and left of the pillows. For our young friend—one knows not why—condemned herself to a semi-obscurity, the daylight filtering through curtains of cloth and muslin. At each angle of the platform was a column carrying a bronze urn of classical shape, suggesting Pompeii, or rather the funeral lamps of a catafalque. A night-table, of the eternal mahogany, stood by the bed. On the other side was an immense pier-glass, as if the "beautiful Juliette," not satisfied at being admired all day, wished to enjoy in her dreams the spectacle of her incomparable person, and the sight of her graces.

In addition to these glasses, other great mirrors in one piece were fixed, a rare thing at that period. The room was almost entirely covered with draperies, and the wainscotting of white picked out with brown, with bronze ornaments finely chiselled, was thus wholly hidden.

All this luxury was harsh, almost official. To-day we should describe it as the luxury of an Atlantic liner. The sternness of the scheme of decoration was happily lightened

[1] Sir John Car, *loc. cit.*, p. 53.—Kotzebue. *Souvenirs de Paris en* 1804.

by draperies in chamois silk trimmed with embroidery, with fringes and ropes of gold standing out in relief on a background of violet and black silk. On the chimneypiece were some beautiful bronzes, on the walls one or two pictures, a few books scattered on the shelves—Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, Raynal's *Histoire Philosophique des deux Indes*. But nothing suggested the existence of a young and pretty woman. Rather was the upholsterer's handicraft the chief impression. The rooms recalled the skill of Bertaud, the fashionable architect, who had been commissioned to carry out the furnishing and decoration. He had the *Voyage du jeune Anacharsis en Grèce* at his finger tips, and he was determined to prove it. The atmosphere was grave, sad, even lugubrious. Day and night a tiny flame flickered in the antique bronze lamps. If the scene had not a sepulchral air it would have conveyed some idea of the home of a vestal. The taste was that of the epoch. Everything was classical throughout the house. But what does it matter whether the frame is antique so long as the goddess in the temple is not!

Immediately she was installed in her mansion Madame Récamier wished to entertain, which was natural and commendable. The supreme enjoyment of wealth is to give enjoyment to others, and to create with discernment a circle of distinguished spirits. Every woman with refined tastes attempts to receive as soon as her circumstances permit, and Madame Récamier had too much intelligence to live like a stingy housekeeper in the Rue Saint-Denis with her servants on one hand, and her kitchen on the other. She inherited from her mother a very pronounced wish to attract amiable people famous for talent, or simply for fortune. She dreamed too much of princes, dukes, and other noblemen. Better advised, on the subject of such grandeur, than Montaigne, who wrote, "if we are unable to reach them, let us despise them," she said: "I will arrive!" From that moment all her actions tended to consolidate her position, and she made use of the best means to vaunt her beauty and reign over the most distinguished section of

Parisian Society. Petticoats have always been able to govern the governors. And this young woman forms a remarkable study, for, at an age when girls dream only of reigning over a heart—if they have any definite ideas at all—she was thinking how to dominate men, salons, and society itself. Wise at twenty, she remained youthful to an advanced age.

These ambitions may have been inspired by the knowledge that she was unable to indulge in the more or less veiled gallantries of her friends. Not possessing such a temperament, which explains the evenness of her humour, her aspirations were different from those of the majority of women. There was nothing vulgar in the tendencies of her mind, and she harnessed herself to the execution of her programme with a good grace. Married so young she had received no education ; a little classical teaching, some music, and those absurd subjects taught without reason, which children have to forget when they enter life. Like most fashionable men and women who are too idle to take the trouble of reading, she knew nothing. Her chief instruction was found in the theatre—the literature of the rich and the happy. She completed her education in the world itself, she heard the conversation of most distinguished men of her time. This happened particularly in her own house, where new books and new plays formed the staple of discussion, so that she had no need to read them to form an opinion. Everything her friends said she repeated like a parrot, and, disinclined to exercise her own wit, her conversation became stereotyped. She did not talk like Madame du Deffand, smartly, often lightly, sometimes wickedly, but always frankly, and without affectation and stiffness. Madame du Deffand did not speak from the heart, for these women had no hearts. Madame du Deffand's natural liveliness was encouraged because it was so unconventional. By the side of the simplicity of the one the conventionality of the other makes a miserable figure, a piece of geometry by the side of a Watteau drawing. Madame Récamier lacked the sparkle of Queen Mab or Titania. She was desperately correct, a

woman tied to a string, with a mind tidied with pins. There was no fantasy about her. All her emotions were carefully buttoned up, yet she found means to have much grace. Her art of pleasing was pre-arranged, her smiling amiabilities studied. Her beauty, truly very great, justified her desire to stand in the front rank of the society of her time. Her fortune, as well as her husband, permitted her to take this place. She took it, together with a habit of pliant good-temper, and thus furthered her proud ambitions. Without having the outward appearance, she became the collaborator of a husband who cleverly made use of his wife's distinguished friendships in the interests of his business.

Madame Récamier soon established her salon on a solid footing. Wealth is a loadstone that attracts the world as irresistibly as poverty frightens society away. In addition, so few salons were open under the Directory that visitors flocked to her doors, especially when the guest received the welcome of a young woman as beautiful as she was amiable. The old friends of Monsieur and Madame Bernard formed the kernel of Madame Récamier's salon. Monsieur de La Harpe was the first to come. The startling conversion of this sceptic, whom Voltaire had described as " an oven that is always warm, yet never bakes," did not please all the visitors to the Rue du Mont-Blanc. More than one piquant epigram saluted his entry, exactly as on the day when he was received at the Académie française. The mistress of the house did not appreciate epigrams, perhaps her benevolence was too great, but she knew how to stop irritating arguments. If Lemontey, always academic and pedantic, solemn into the bargain as a moralist and historian should be, engaged in overlong literary debates, Barrère, who was much occupied with politics, made only short and discreet appearances. This crooked intriguer did not care to meet Camille Jordan, who, under the charming manners of a man of the world, possessed a straightforward spirit and firm character, virtues not always in sympathy with the abilities of the politician. The coup d'état of Fructidor having removed Barrère for a while from society, he did not return

to the Récamiers until the Consulate. For business purposes, the banker wished to see men of every shade of opinion, more particularly those who might influence the Government. He desired his house to become a neutral ground where his young wife's amiability would extinguish the hatreds of party and caste, and bury the animosities which divided a society in the throes of giving birth to a new constitution. On one side was the returned "émigré" with an empty purse, bowing meanly before the ostentatious marvels of the new wealth. On the other side, a regicide of the Convention paraded himself. And the royalist was ready to pay his court to the influence which had the power to restore his confiscated property. Young republican generals[1] elbowed former officers of the king's army. Literary men, and diplomatists, such as Monmerqué, Ducis, Talleyrand, Roederer, were attracted by riches as moths by a flame. With urbanity, distinguished manners, and good taste, they rubbed off some of the roughness of the agents and bankers who were not equally accustomed to society. The honest Séguin can be quoted as an example, though Ouvrard and Perregaux had been brought up in a more refined school.

Madame Récamier had the merit of creating harmony amongst men whose political passions were disturbed by the revolutionary crisis. If they did not become cordial to each other under her roof, they at least acted with discretion. Many came to the banker's house to obtain some favour, such as a share in public works or military contracts, which might be captured through his influence. Fouché, who was

[1] Masséna, the eldest of these generals, but the youngest in heart, was, with Moreau, Bernadotte, Junot, Sébastiani, and others, amongst the fanatical admirers of the young woman. When he left to take command of the army of Italy, he begged Madame Récamier to give him as a talisman a piece of white ribbon which hung from her dress. By the victory of Marengo, the First Consul delivered the Genoese prisoners, and Masséna sent the following note to Paris: "The charming ribbon Madame Récamier gave has been carried by General Masséna through the battles and blockades of Genoa. It has never left the general, and has certainly helped him to victory." (Chateaubriand: *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 407).

able in two or three years to amass twenty millions of francs, together with Tallien and Réal, formed the Ouin combination. The visitors to this salon checked their social hates and political resentments as much for the desire of gain as for the love of the gracious mistress of the house. On the other hand the smiles and the amiability of that young woman were probably a commercial manœuvre, instigated by Monsieur Récamier to aid the prosperity of his bank rather than the celebrity of her drawing-room. This curious husband was always delighted to see a crowd at his soirées. He knew quite well that they came, not for friendship towards him but in admiration of the beautiful Juliette. But he forgot nothing which might flatter his guests, and the greater they were in number the happier he felt. True to his business, he did not neglect little economies in his home as well as in his office. His expenses were always carefully guarded, and his middle-class economies covered him in ridicule. Madame Cavaignac tells the story that "at one of these great balls Madame Récamier felt unwell, and went to bed. The door of her bedroom opened. A prying person entered to admire the delightful person who lost none of her charms in the négligé of an invalid. A second person entered, then ten, then the whole crowd. The last-comers stood on the chairs to have their share of the spectacle. Monsieur Récamier made them stand on dust-cloths, so that his guests should take their pleasure without injuring his furniture."[1]

Naturally, as Madame Récamier received, she also visited. The financiers were the first to open their salons. Their world had a splendour which gradually increased during the Directory. Messieurs Bazin and Vanberchem, who were partners in a bank, shared the same house, and gave beautiful fêtes at No. 95 Rue de Cléry. Hottinguer gave even more beautiful celebrations at his hôtel, No. 3 Rue de Provence. Tourton, Ravel, and Perregaux entertained with

[1] *Mémoires d'une inconnue*, p. 113. Kotzebue says that the anecdote is an exaggeration. (*Souvenirs de Paris en* 1804, Vol. I., Chap. IV.)

a luxury rivalling the others. Ouvrard surpassed them in good taste, as well as the surprises of his dinners and suppers. Michel, Lecouteulx, Julien, Hervas, Basterrèche, d'Etchegoyen, Delessert, Baguenault, Pourtalès, Vanrobais, Hamelin, Enfantin, Barillon, Doyen, and many others, opened their doors. Not a day passed that the beautiful Madame Récamier did not attend at least one soirée and a dinner. She met the most fashionable women in Paris; Madame de Rougemont, charming for youthfulness and affability; Madame Hamelin, charming also, but for effrontery; Madame Malet; Madame de Permon, and her daughter—who was soon to marry General Junot and become Duchesse d'Abrantês; Madame Dourmerc and her daughter—afterwards Madame Delannoy; Madame Roger; Madame Hainguerlot, as tall as a drum-major; Mademoiselle Perregaux, who became the wife of General Marmont, then later Duchesse de Raguse, embittering the life of her unhappy husband. . . .

General Bonaparte returned from Egypt, and with sudden energetic action became all-powerful as First Consul. Madame Récamier signalised the opening of a new century by enlarging the list of her visitors. The military element reinforced her fêtes. The banker hoped to please the First Consul and merit his favours, by inviting his aides-de-camp, Lannes, Junot, Marmont, other generals, his brother-in-law Murat, Bernadotte, his son-in-law Eugène, and Sébastiani, his fellow-countryman and devoted disciple upon the 18th Brumaire.

Perhaps Récamier thought he would find amongst these generals friends who might be of service with the new power, and thus continue the advantages he had received from the late Government. But the First Consul was planning the cauterisation of the wounds caused by the contractors. Monsieur Récamier had to renounce his hopes. The decline of his bank commenced immediately the financial administration of the Republic became ordered and honest.

It was not however to protest against so novel a combination that Madame Récamier's salon became a centre of

NAPOLEON
*From the engraving by Bartolozzi after Appiani published in 1802*

opposition from the beginning of the Consulate. The hostility of the young woman to the First Consul may be ascribed to her bad humour at being neglected by him. He paid little attention to her, and in one instance he did not play a wholly creditable part. During the last days of the monarchy, Monsieur Bernard, her father, had been a receiver of taxes in Paris. He was now a postal administrator. Napoleon said at Saint Helena that "a correspondence with the Chouans had been entered into with the connivance of Monsieur Bernard."[1] This was hardly correct. The functionary had aided a periodical sheet, edited by one of his friends, the Abbé Guyot, which critised the Government, the First Consul, and the members of his family.[2] Madame Récamier has neglected to explain all the facts in the otherwise interesting fragments of memoirs her niece inserted in *Souvenirs et Correspondance*. She limited herself to citing the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hèlène* with a kind of pride—to please her royalist friends—because the *Mémorial* said that her father was engaged in secret communications with the Chouans. She wished to prove that her royalism was not of recent date, and dictated by circumstances, but really hereditary.

Monsieur Bernard was arrested. "His daughter," wrote Méneval, "asserted his innocence in vain. Monsieur Bernard was convicted of an abuse of confidence. Instead of being sent to judgment he was dismissed."[3] This favour was obtained by the application of General Bernadotte, who generously interested himself in Madame Récamier. Her acquaintance he had recently made. She certainly owed him the gratitude that she expressed. She might even have offered presents to those who had refrained from sending her father for judgment. The penalty of Bernard's crime was death, and it was from this that the First Consul had saved him. But at this moment Madame Récamier was under the influence of Madame de Staël, who was in opposition

[1] *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène.*
[2] Méneval. *Mémoires*, Vol. II., p. 13.
[3] *Ibid.*

to those she had tried to seduce before the 18th Brumaire. Particularly was this so in the case of General Moreau, whose mother-in-law, Madame Hulot, was very friendly with Madame Bernard, Juliette's mother. The intimacy gave a slightly antagonistic air to Madame Récamier's salon, which was accentuated by the visits of General Bernadotte. This appearance of opposition was aggravated by some royalists of mark who, under a mask of republican convictions, sympathised with the discontented generals. Their unavowed hope was to make use of military jealousies and quarrels to further the monarchist cause. Amongst these royalists of the first rank were Adrien de Montmorency, his cousin the Vicomte Mathieu de Montmorency, the Comte Louis de Narbonne—both these were former lovers of Madame de Staël—Christian de Lamoignon, and Ségur "sans cérémonies," brother to the grand-master of the ceremonies at the imperial court.

Mathieu and Adrien de Montmorency became close friends with Madame Récamier, and their friendship was only ended by death. The reader must be introduced to them in every particular.

Like all gentlemen, Mathieu de Montmorency began life in the army. When the American War thrilled with a generous fever those members of the French nobility who were not enervated by pleasure and lack of occupation, idleness gave way to chivalry, and every soldier wished to help the insurgents. Monsieur de Montmorency went like many others. He had already the disposition of a wandering knight. It was the fashion. He had married Mademoiselle de Luynes, and had a daughter.[1] Believing himself from that instant free of the responsibilities of marriage, he plunged into dissipation. It was also a fashion, which the Comte d'Artois had set. Monsieur de Montmorency had a notorious liaison with Madame de Staël. "I was young," he said afterwards. "I entered life with all the exaltation and passions of youth. I ran after every

[1] Elisa, who married later the Vicomte Sosthène de la Rochefoucauld.

woman, and mocked at the restraints of marriage and the laws which govern family life."[1] However, he returned from America with vague ideas of liberty, and the regeneration of France by the equality of all her citizens in the eyes of the law. After reading the *Contrat Social* his uncertain and confused ideas became clearer. Sent to the Etats-Généraux by the assembly of Montfort-l'Amaury he became the disciple of Sieyès. The ardour of his temperament, the general movement of thought, his reading as well, threw him into the party of the reformers. Madame de Staël, who saw only through her father's eyes, also had some influence. Mathieu's mother, a true woman of her period, holding some broad-minded principles on conjugal fidelity,[2] gave him on her part an example of liberty. Afterwards his friends bitterly reproached him for some of his actions. For others he never pardoned himself. He voted, in the famous sitting of August 4, in favour of the Vicomte de Noailles' motion to abolish privilege. On June 16, 1790, he voted for the suppression of nobility. Renouncing publicly his own title, he gave an example of the annihilation of "these anti-social distinctions, thus effacing from the constitutional code the whole institution of nobility and the vain ostentation of servitude." Shortly after, Monsieur de Montmorency approved of the project for removing the bodies of Rousseau and Voltaire to the Pantheon. Then, at the call of his country, a soldier's blood coursing through his veins, he left for the frontier as aide-de-camp to the Marshal de Lückner. Forced to emigrate, he remembered his old friend Madame de Staël, and found refuge at Coppet.

The death of his brother on the revolutionary scaffold changed his ideas immediately. Ever unstable and unreflecting, he became a royalist again, flying to devotion and all the prejudices of the aristocracy. To such a degree did this reaction tend that he now thanked God for allowing

[1] Madame Ancelot. *Un salon de Paris*, p. 317.

[2] Baron de Barante. *Souvenirs*, Vol. I., p. 88. "After her return from the emigration she lived publicly with Narbonne, who was separated from his wife."

him to be born a Montmorency. From that instant religious fervour was the dominating trait of his character. Instead of Montmorency-Don Juan he became Montmorency-Sir Charles Grandison.

This penitent chevalier remained, however, an original type. He may be described as a devout Don Quixote. Each night he entered the fashionable world with the airs of a gentleman, and an imperious manner which he had found in the Auvergne regiment, and which his association with the Marshal de Lückner's staff had not lessened. He tried to fuse it in his pious attitude, but the amalgam was never successfully accomplished. Full of loyalty, with a soul proud rather than lofty, aristocratic rather than noble, and yet more noble than distinguished, Mathieu was " neither a great intelligence nor a fine character," according to the Duc de Broglie,[1] who knew him, but " a very little mind, quietly passionate and obstinate "—the judgment of Louis XVIII.[2]

To a woman of the middle-class, such as Madame Récamier, thoroughly enamoured of gentility, it did not matter that a gentleman lacked intelligence. This young man, pale and fair, with a large forehead, was a Montmorency, the first family in Christendom ! She asked no more.

There was little to be demanded from his cousin Adrien de Montmorency, Prince and then Duc de Laval. He was a second edition of Mathieu. A braggart, far prouder and less devout, clothed in the glory of an historical name, he paraded his nobility of birth more than any other member of his house.[3] He was pride itself. Hide-bound by prejudices and ridiculous ideas, walking on the stilts of his pretensions, a free speaker in spite of a defect in pronunciation, yet an empty talker, this piece of drawing-room furni-

[1] Duc Victor de Broglie. *Souvenirs,* Vol. III., p. 32.

[2] Guizot. *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps,* Vol. I., p. 249. As Louis XVIII. expressed himself thus upon one of his most devoted servants the remark must be true.

[3] " The scornful and protecting air which formed with extreme politeness the inimitable manners of a great lord." (Chateaubriand. *Mémoires d'outre tombe,* Vol. I., p. 204.)

ture had surprising self-assurance. He doubted nothing, and as a last resource carried off his assertions with a high hand. He was a perfect example of the ignorant fools who crowd every salon. The world regards them with respect because they are self-possessed, have a jargon at their command, and are wealthy—three things which are often misinterpreted as intelligence. Adrien modelled his behaviour upon that of the Comte d'Artois, who was the idol of the young court nobility under the defunct monarchy. His aristocratic insolence, his easy-going manners, a certain gift of wrapping up ready-made phrases in the fashionable slang, concealed his lack of solidity. His ready conversation gave him an appearance of wit—but a very worthless wit. Madame Geoffrin described him, as she described the Abbé Trublet, as "a fool who had rubbed against intelligence." Ignorant as he was, the noble duke realised one fact that wise men often forget. The world always takes importance for merit, verbiage for intelligence, and modesty for silliness.[1] These two cousins, the most distinguished of their rank, can be described in the words of Ducis :

"What would remain of them without their ancestors?"

However, the pretensions of Adrien de Montmorency did not go down with everybody. Madame de Rémusat, who had a delicate and sure taste, could not endure him. She wrote to her husband, July 20, 1807: "this Adrien de M . . . oppresses me with his tedious and idle visits. He possesses a desolating perfection, the light manner peculiar to the young Parisian men, and a freedom with women to which I am not accustomed. So he calls me prudish and ceremonious. He can usually be seen stretched upon a sofa giving utterance to a screed—every phrase mediocre and common—crying out that he detests vulgarity, that he loves nothing but chivalry, that he is the victim of illusions, and that the only real thing in the world is prestige. Madame de Staël's society has sent all these words flying through his head, but he uses them wrongly, he never

[1] Rabelais had already remarked that "Mediocrity is always praised and esteemed."

waits for an answer, and never joins one idea to another. The first two or three times I was caught. He seemed to speak well. When he started rigmaroling, I decided to follow. A moment after I found myself travelling alone. My man had stopped short. After this discovery I became tranquil. When he talks now I appear to listen, but I think of something else. As at the moment I am reading history, remembrances of his ancestors cross my mind, and they form my thoughts as he talks away."[1]

These two men were the closest friends of Madame Récamier. I believe that in their company she had many secret pangs that a face so beautiful should carry a name so little distinguished. What was Récamier by the side of Montmorency ! It was enough to make her die of shame. And then not the slightest armorial bearing to rival their cross of gules on a field of gold. She had not even emigrated during the Revolution. What inferiority ! In truth, it was very sad . . . But these two gentlemen had the goodness not to show their knowledge of these apprehensions. Thus she had a particular regard for them both. They became constant visitors to her drawing-room, and gave her a most pronounced royalist complexion.[2]

This middle-class salon was not open unrestrictedly. If a man was not a general, not a gentleman, not celebrated, not a millionaire, he could not hope to force its doors. As her house was crowded with " the pick of the basket " there was no need to encourage the lower circles. She was too clever to invite those she did not wish to see. Before, she had been contented with her beauty. Now she tried coquetry. She had more need of being amused than of being loved.

[1] *Lettres de Madame de Rémusat*, Vol. II., p. 192.

[2] Perhaps Stendhal was thinking of Madame Récamier and her court when he wrote : " the extremely beautiful women do not astonish one so much the second day. . . . Their merit being visible to every one, and being purely decorative, they ought to count more fools in the list of their lovers, princes and millionaires." . . . Chateaubriand and Benjamin Constant were, however, not fools.

Amongst her many visitors were some men who, to any eye less piercing and suspicious than that of the First Consul, diminished the atmosphere of hostility which these grumbling generals and returned exiles gave to her salon. At the beginning they were received for their names and social rank, rather than for their political opinions. It was not until later that Madame de Staël, together with Adrien and Mathieu de Montmorency, prevailed upon "the beauty of the beauties" to join the ranks of opposition. As Madame Récamier had no physical passions she was unable to have any convictions, particularly in politics. For the one is the result of the other, when not complicated by interests of rank, social position, ambition, vanity, or money. At this period of furious hatreds and general anger, Madame Récamier took no side. She received, attracted would be a better word, every person of mark, no matter to which party he belonged. Everybody at one moment or another was of use to the bank. For this reason there met under her roof General Murat, Madame Murat and Madame Baciocchi, sisters to the First Consul, and the young Eugène de Beauharnais, his son-in-law, who tried to gain his spurs as a Colonel of the Guides whilst paying court to the young woman. He appeared, and indeed believed himself to be very much in love with her. Madame Récamier neglected no weapon in her arsenal to gain the satisfaction of inscribing the name of a fresh heart upon the catalogue of those who had been disturbed by her charms. She was beautiful, and clever enough to play with her beauty. Too innocent to resist her coquetries, which caught far more experienced men, Josephine's son fell a ready victim. Nothing could be more natural. However, he was quickly advised not to take the affair too seriously, but his flirtation with the intoxicating Juliette was very deep. One evening, under the pretext of admiring more closely a hand which was only graceful at a distance, he seized the fingers of Madame Récamier, detached a ring, and declared that he would preserve it as a remembrance. More modest, Masséna was contented with a tiny piece of white ribbon from her coiffure. He was

able to keep his ribbon. Eugène was less happy, for he was obliged to return the ring. The next day he wrote to Madame Récamier. With childish enthusiasm he spoke of the loves of Francis I., and recalled the fact that the arrival of Madame de Chateaubriand at the Court had been caused by a ring. Following the analogy of this historical anecdote, he begged Madame Récamier to allow him to keep the ring she had worn, which he would preserve as a talisman.

Madame Récamier did not agree. She beat a retreat after having encouraged the attack, and played the prude after having acted the coquette. A short correspondence took place, and finally Eugène consented to give back the ring. "I have cruelly deceived myself," he said. "I have just cause to complain, and you should admit it. Be good enough, madame, to soften the fate of a man who is sincerely attached to you."[1]

"I have cruelly deceived myself," said Eugène. He was too polite to write, "you have cruelly deceived me." But he allowed it to be understood when he added that he had "just cause of complaint." In a dignified manner he reproached this coquette who had encouraged him in order to refuse what she seemed at first only too anxious to give.

Madame Récamier lacked ideals, and convictions. Call these qualities moral chimeras if you wish, yet they remain ambitions which elevate the soul above the stingy avarice of the world and the idleness of drawing-rooms. With a virtuous art at which we cannot refrain from smiling, because it was based upon coquetry rather than nature, this gracious banker's wife wished to appear poor. In fact she made it her kingdom and saw nothing outside. Eugène is the first to unveil for our benefit the little tricks, more or less innocent, through which this wise woman endeavoured to provoke enthusiasm. By preference she attacked people most in the public view, not so much for the pleasure of conversing with distinguished wits but for the vanity of

[1] Catalogue Charavay: *Vente d'autographes du 27 Mai* 1895. The books of Madame Lenormant do not mention this letter, or even Eugène.

including them amongst her visitors. She wanted to exhibit them, to use them as an advertisement. At first this procession of celebrities was not without value to the house. It contributed to increase the influence of the Récamiers. At last the young woman was most delightfully flattered in her secret vanities. The world believed that her beauty and merits were sufficient to attract to her feet every man of mark. Upon this pedestal she struck an agreeable attitude before her contemporaries, perhaps before posterity and history.

## CHAPTER III

THE First Consul was the most important person of his time. Naturally Madame Récamier burned with the desire to reach his circle, and, employing an expression of that age, to attach him to her chariot. For no other reason she made advances to his sisters, Pauline, Elisa, and Caroline, whose uncertain humours could not in any case harmonise with her honeyed and velvet temperament. With the same aim she made friends with his brother-in-law, General Murat, with General Bernadotte, who was brother-in-law to Joseph Bonaparte, his son-in-law, Eugène de Beauharnais, his aides-de-camp, Junot and Marmont, and with Masséna. She did not forget his brother Lucien, the Minister of the Interior. Madame Lenormant's explanation of the origin of Lucien's love for Madame Récamier is deceptive. The young woman, who had already met him in the world of finance, played the same game she had played with Eugène and others, the game of coquetry. Having already marvellously succeeded, she decided to continue the same plan. Lucien's wife was very ill at the moment, he had many other anxieties to worry over, and he did not rise to the bait quickly enough. Madame Récamier proposed to return to the charge—Madame Lenormant admits that Lucien's friendship was useful and worth cultivating—when suddenly Madame Lucien Bonaparte was carried off by the consumption which had been threatening her.

Lucien had been carving out one career while his brother had been engaged upon another. Nothing in him recalled the little provision agent of Saint Maximin, who disguised

*Photo : Levy*

PAULINE BORGHESE AND HER SON
*After the painting by Prudhon in the Chartres Museum*

himself under the nickname of Brutus in order to secure his election to the Council of the Five Hundred. Directly he was elected, he helped to kick the Council into the gutter.

He was mixed up in all kinds of jobberies, of one sort and another, and tried to penetrate into the financial world to share its gains rather than its gaieties. The members of this brilliant circle did not confine themselves to the usual course of banking operations. They were occupied with foreign exchange, various speculations—particularly in connection with the property of the *émigrés*—and also in military contracts. Everything was good that came to their net. General Bonaparte's brother wanted part of the spoil. A professional politician, type of a race which has since multiplied like the weeds of an ill-kept garden, Lucien saw in the management of public business a means of adding to his pocket. Thus he tried to establish a footing among the bankers, who were all thieves and vagabonds, but at the same time all very wealthy. They did not refuse to receive him, for they remembered his striking speech against the squandering of the public funds before the Council of the Five Hundred. His support was valuable. Besides, they guessed that his brother would not limit his ambitions to the command of the army. Lucien attributed his welcome in the salons of the bankers to his own personal merits. He assumed from day to day an assurance that his youth and his family relationships might have excused, although it was justified neither by his worth nor his knowledge. If his character had been of any value his modesty would have been greater. When his participation in the 18th Brumaire brought him the portfolio of the Ministry of the Interior, he was barely twenty-five. He was tall, badly made, and clumsy in his movements, with long arms, long legs, and big hands. Like his sister Elisa he was angular, and his body was as awkward as his mind. His features were more favourable, and recalled the bearing of a soldier. His eyes would have had a soft expression if they had not been spoilt by a perpetual nervous twitching. His chin especially, his face generally, resembled his brother's, with a slight touch

of femininity that was almost feline.[1] Round-shouldered, with his head pushed forward, from a distance he had the appearance of a much older man. Proud of these advantages, and endeavouring to heighten them by an exaggerated elegance, which became in consequence nothing but bad taste, Lucien, with his continual gesticulations, possessed a senseless self-conceit. He talked in high-sounding phrases, with learned quotations to add to the effect. He spouted aphorisms which failed to dazzle. With women, he posed as an inspired poet, with the older politicians he affected the attitude of a man of experience. If he conceded to his brother Napoleon superiority in the arts of war, he allowed it to be quietly understood that in other matters, and above all in politics, any comparison was entirely in his favour.

With so happy a belief in his talents, he was equally well-satisfied with his appearance, which he believed irresistible. He announced himself as the lover of the prettiest women in Paris. He had ravaged the most noble hearts. He had been loved by the Baroness de Sartory, niece to General de Wimpffen. After her came a young lady from Avignon, the Comtesse de Graveson. He owed it to himself, and to his name, only to be loved in the most aristocratic circles. These " indiscretions " were so discreet that he believed the world would forget that a man with such distinguished mistresses could own a wife so mediocre ; besides, it was fashionable, as it is to-day, to lead a dissipated life. A man who kept a dancing girl was more considered than a man who looked after an old mother or a sister. Lucien masqueraded as a Don Juan, using his love affairs to keep himself well in evidence in the salons, as he had used his meddlesome ambition in the deliberations of the Council of the Five Hundred. His reputation only lacked an amorous intrigue with " the beauty of the beauties."

Madame Récamier's coquetries were based on aspirations

[1] An Englishman, by name of Yorke, said of him : " His manners and his bearing are distinguished, although he has the physiognomy of a murderous Italian Jew." (Sir John Carr. *The English in France after the Peace of Amiens*, p. 67.)

similar to his own. When, urged by the same vanity, she sought to attract to her house a celebrated or notorious man, she knew how to tickle his self-conceit. It was her amusement to envelop him in the more or less invisible threads of a clever and complicated drawing-room diplomacy. She was thus able to gain one more admirer to praise her intelligence, who did not discover until afterwards that he had been made a dupe. No spider ever more adroitly caught in her web the poor fly she envied. When she made advances to Lucien—for, despite Madame Lenormant, she was the first to move—the ground had been already prepared. If she stepped forward to receive the homage of Lucien it was not for his good looks and brilliant reputation as a man about town, but because he was Minister of the Interior, brother of the First Consul, and a man whose presence would throw a lustre on her salon, and whose influence would further her husband's schemes.

The friendship that existed between Madame Récamier and Lucien Bonaparte before the Consulate was merely a casual intercourse. Probably it commenced at Bagatelle, where Monsieur Sappey, a business man with whom Lucien had dealings, gave a dinner. Madame Récamier invited him to visit her, and there was no need to press for an acceptance. A man is always flattered at the advances of a pretty woman—even of an ugly one! Here Madame Récamier was guilty, but always, with *coquetry*. One of her best friends, Madame de Boigne, wrote: "The epitaph of coquette does not suit Madame Récamier, for she is too much of a coquette to be called a coquette." [1] This reason is not worth much. When a woman plays the coquette with every man who crosses her path instead of with one or two, it is easy to note that her behaviour leaves much to be desired, that she makes a business of coquetry, and that her interest is not the pleasure other women usually extract from the pastime. But this does not stop her from being a coquette. She becomes a manufacturer of practical

[1] Louis Favre. *Denis Etienne Pasquier*, p. 338. Letter from the Comtesse de Boigne to Monsieur Pasquier.

coquetry, which is far worse. It is repugnant to see material interests hypocritically hidden under amiabilities which are supposed to express the sentiments of the heart. Madame Récamier devoted herself to this industry with facility. She had the habit. Her tiny waxen figure, in the blossom of her twentieth year, gave her such an appearance of candid innocence that it would have been unkind to reproach her for imprudences which often accompany the first steps of a very young woman in the world. On the other hand her actions must not be praised. She was wholly affected; her wish to conform to the respectabilities had killed all natural feelings; truthfulness had been lost in art. Her talent was employed to attain a perfection of manners which was nothing but a worship of the conventions. Conventionality is but a means for people without energy or brains to adopt an attitude of superiority to those more richly gifted. Like the rest of the world, Madame Récamier was contented with outward appearances. She did not ask whether a man had a heart, but whether he was " correct." She did not demand wit or originality, but rather notoriety.

Distinguished, but not otherwise superior, entirely mistress of herself because her heart was incapable of rising in rebellion, very calm, for her most ethereal coqueteries were nothing but material interests, Madame Récamier never lost sight of the aim in view. She desired only to widen and strengthen her influence over the fashionable world of Paris. This was her business. By amiable stratagems, by little artificial intrigues, by gracious smiles, she captured a brilliant position which beauty and intelligence—with dignity as their sole aid—will not give to any woman in society who does not encourage shamelessness. She had a keen worldly judgment. Her character has been much praised, but all she did was to refuse capitulating (and for good reason) to the very natural attacks of the victims of her flirtations.

She tried to catch Lucien Bonaparte as she tried to catch every distinguished man. She only encouraged men at the summit of their social success, those who were the most inaccessible and difficult to reach. The others were childish.

They were always wanting to confess to a woman, and ready to submit to the yoke of a petticoat. The beautiful Juliette knew this, and understood still better the advantages to be gained from these failings. Her aim at the moment was to get hold of the family and friends of General Bonaparte, so that she might actually conquer the victor of Italy and Egypt.

Madame Lenormant does not explain the relationship of her aunt and Lucien in this way. But she recognises that he visited her house, and that her aunt did not disdain to go to his fêtes. Her remembrance deceived her, however, when she dated this acquaintance as beginning during the Directory. Madame Récamier was not really serious until the Consulate. Why? Simply because she wished to be on good terms with the First Consul's brother, as she already was with his sisters Elisa and Caroline, and his son-in-law, Eugène. She made the first advances. Her dignity as a woman was always accommodating.

Thus provoked, the latent love that slumbers at the bottom of every human heart suddenly awoke in Lucien Bonaparte. A man of his age is always ready to accept the challenge when the occasion arrives. Juliette offered him a chance of excitement, which he did not refuse.

Lucien entered into a flirtation with a young woman whose beauty was renowned. She did not retreat before his lively attacks. Her sense of dignity should have put a summary end to them. The unpleasant fact must be admitted that she not only tolerated but encouraged them. She prudently allowed Lucien to compromise her, gave him permission to call her by her Christian name, received letters written in a tone that passed simple friendship. All these things amused her perhaps, but the amusement was not that of a serious woman. If she did not wish to become Lucien's mistress, why did she provoke his love?

In May, 1800, Lucien lost his wife. Christine Boyer was the sister of the innkeeper of Saint-Maximin. In recognition of the goodwill of a man who had given him lodging and food without payment, he had seduced and afterwards married

the sister. Madame Récamier wrote a letter of condolence to Lucien, which proves that she attached some value to his goodwill. He called her "Julie," which also shows that their intimacy was not recent, for it is not usual to call a woman by an intimate name the day after one has been introduced to her. He then wrote: "If you had known her, Julie, she who now rests at Plessis,[1] you would have loved her as a sister. She was without a flaw. My happiness as a man has been buried with her. I have been too much loved, ever to be loved again."

This letter is the first of thirty-three, comprising about one hundred and four pages, which turned up in a sale of autographs at the Hôtel Drouot, May 27, 1895. "The following letters," wrote Monsieur Charavay, who compiled the catalogue, "are full of burning declarations, and reiterated complaints at the coldness of Madame Récamier." Madame Lenormant, after Benjamin Constant and Chateaubriand, published several of these letters, but not in full. I do not intend to reproduce them. But here is one the niece did not make use of, giving the story of their early relationship.

"Do you remember," writes Lucien, "the day I was presented to you for the first time? We celebrated in a crowded banquet the reconciliation of our fathers. I returned from the Senate, where the troubles raised for the Republic had created a deep impression. You arrived. Everybody crowded round you. 'How beautiful she is,' cried one. During the evening the crowd filled the gardens of Bedmar. Importunate people, who are to be found everywhere, took possession of me. I had neither patience nor affability with them, for they kept me apart from you! I wished to speak of the trouble I was in. I knew what love was, and I wished to master it. I was captivated, and we left the fête together.

"I have seen you since. Love has seemed to smile at me. One day, seated on the banks of a river, passively dreaming, you stripped the petals of a rose. Alone with you

[1] Plessis-Chamant was Lucien's estate near Senlis.

I have spoken . . . I heard a sigh . . . vain illusion! Convinced of my error, I noticed tranquil indifference seated between us. . . . The passion that masters me is shown in my speech, but your words breathe the amiable and cruel imprint of a happy child . . ."

This letter is dated July 29, and must be the first in this romance, by correspondence, conducted over a tomb. In order to leave a back-door, a retreat in case of a check, Lucien, when writing to Juliette, took the very natural pseudonym of Romeo. The inflammatory prose was sent from Plessis Chamant. Suddenly, realising the absurdity of the affair, he threw off the mask, with the cry: "Juliette, it is no longer Romeo, it is I who write to you. . . ." And, in long and tiresome enumeration, he addresses her with a string of emphatic declarations. Nothing is more ridiculous than these stock-phrases of love, when read in cold blood. We find much vanity, an especial fault in French gallantry, often taking the place of a true affection. Added to this we notice a strong dose of pedantry, together with more than enough of dogmatism. With all these qualities, it is very surprising that Lucien did not gain a definite victory. An undated letter, which Benjamin Constant places at the moment of the return of Bonaparte from Egypt, the end of the year VII. of the Republic, may belong to this epoch. It runs: "After receiving your letter I was waited upon by several diplomatists. I learnt some news public rumour has probably already told you. Felicitations surround me, stupefy me. . . ." These lines must refer to the victory of Marengo (June 14, 1800), the news of which reached Paris about the 25th, a month after Lucien was left a widower. He soon treated his widowhood as lightly as he had behaved whilst a married man. He threw it off after having had a funeral in Corsican style for the woman he did not weep over, and then ordered a superb mausoleum of white marble. To distract him, his mother and his sister Elisa came to his estate, and they treated the period of mourning as an excuse for a summer holiday. He was occupied by his love for Madame Récamier, but when he saw

that she did not reciprocate his affection he became more angry than desperate. "If you absolutely decide that you will never give way to love, I hope that you will always enjoy that calm which seems to satisfy all your vows." He made no allusion to the shallowness of the soul of the woman who had provoked this flirtation merely to deceive him. At Plessis Chamant he had enough leisure to think over her artifices, and to unravel her coquetry. "I am thirsty for sentiment, I find amiability," he wrote to her. "I complain; she laughs." "I am burning with the fire she has shamelessly lit." Before her coldness he could do nothing but make his obeisance and think no more of her. This was how he intended to act, and decided first to acquaint Juliette with his great determination. He wrote a letter, and then tore it up. Instead of a farewell, he sent a new declaration of love. "Oh, Juliette! you never were, you never will be loved as you are at this moment." He did not content himself with writing. If he spoke to her, face to face, he believed that his good looks and his eloquence would have more force than his prose. He rushed up to Paris, and, full of ardour, shivered before the smiling but icy coquette who pretended to be in love with every man and gave herself to none. Returning to Plessis, Lucien was not able to resist writing a letter in which he tells her that he will never see her again. "Enjoy this calm for ever if it adds to your happiness, but allow your wretched friend to remove and lessen—if possible—by absence the power of your charms."

Madame Récamier was cruel but not wicked. She did not desire her admirers to die. Still less did she wish them to go into exile. She replied to Lucien, saying that she had much friendship for him, suggesting that they should live happily with the feelings of brother and sister. Lucien seized the idea, and wrote: "My dear sister." There is irony in the phrase. An indiscreet thought gives rise to the question: "Was Monsieur Récamier at the bottom of the little intrigue?"

Yes, certainly he was. His faithful wife, realising that his financial interests were likely to be touched, did not

forget to warn him. Anyway, the situation was grave. To spurn the brother of the First Consul, the Minister of the Interior . . . . This could not fail to have an unpleasant effect upon the business of the bank. Not only would Lucien become an enemy, but the whole Bonaparte family would be alienated. The future was so serious that Madame Récamier asked for her husband's advice. Her niece tells us the story. " He praised his young wife's virtue, thanked her for the confidence she showed, and warned her to act with the same prudence and wisdom she had already displayed. At the same time he realised that to close his door to General Bonaparte's brother, openly to break all friendship with a man so high in rank, would seriously compromise and possibly ruin his bank. He desired that Lucien should not be driven to desperation, yet nothing should be granted him."

This is admirable advice, and yet it is surprising that Madame Lenormant, a woman of common-sense, was able to repeat it. She reveals a picture of Madame Récamier turning her beauty to account, and ready to sell her smiles under the complaisant eye of a husband, who preferred to compromise his wife rather than injure his business. Juliette was a capital from which he could draw a rich interest. He treated her as an article of commerce. The young woman lent herself to these plots, but in her case there was more sport than acting, and more acting than sincerity. She became a broker for her husband's bank, and a retailer of smiles. The whole affair smelt of the shop, and was far from poetical. This vulgar, earthly, mercantile aspect is the most displeasing side of the Récamier household. She sold merchandise she never intended to deliver. She exercised her *métier* of coquette to draw a more or less immediate benefit. Her commercial spirit kills our sympathy. Formal and stiff, she lacked natural and spontaneous movement, and, above all, passion.

Lucien began to discover the truth. As an artist, however, he wished to assume the air of Werther. So, more for his satisfaction than hers, he wrote : " I am not able to hate

you, but I am able to kill myself. This word makes you smile, and if your mirror be handy the glass will reflect your cannibal laugh. Well, laugh away. Laugh, for you are beautiful. But you are not able to fathom the depth of my love, my frenzy, my unhappiness."

His unhappiness he suffered in patience. Tired of the business tricks of the banker's wife, Lucien dismissed her. He broke with her according to all the forms of courtesy, he offered some tender and despairing remarks, and he asked for his letters. He did not accept the friendship she offered, saying that he could not accommodate himself to such sentiments after the passion that had been excited in him to the last point of exasperation. " You have made a law that you will never listen to a declaration of love. Will it give you happiness ? I doubt it. You make yourself a chimera, you bow down before an idol you have created, and you sacrifice to this god your own happiness and that of your friends."[1]

There it remained, for the correspondence went no further. Lucien insisted that his letters should be returned. Madame Récamier did not wish to give them up. " For my part, I look upon them as unexceptionable evidence of her virtue," wrote Madame Lenormant.[2] Arsène Houssaye says, of the same matter : " Virtue has no need to take so much care of itself."[3]

Madame Récamier was more positive than is generally imagined. Quite practical, under the appearance of goodwill and softness, her heart was dry. Her beauty rendered her an enchantress, but it is easy to recognise in each of her actions a personal interest of more or less immediate value. Up to the present the biographical studies of her are but rhetorical amplifications of her beauty, her kindness and her grace. They are pious litanies, but not history.

One fact mentioned by Madame Lenormant must be remembered. Monsieur Recamier's business ceased to

[1] *Vente d'autographes du 27 Mai*, 1895. Catalogue Charavay.
[2] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 34.
[3] Arsène Houssaye. *Les femmes du temps passé*, p. 433.

prosper from 1800.[1] She ascribes it to the repulse of Lucien Bonaparte, which " will gravely compromise and perhaps ruin his bank."[2]

This idyll between the beautiful Juliette and Lucien had an epilogue. It would have been better for them both had there been none. Possibly Lucien, furious at his failure, and also at the refusal to return the letters, treated Madame Récamier's intrigue rather severely in conversation with his friends. Madame Récamier must have had wind of these remarks. Juliette retaliated by revealing to her intimate friends the history of the passion which had blazed in the heart of the Minister of the Interior. She amused them with descriptions of his bad manners and taste, and to show his faults in grammar and spelling brought out his letters. Her friends did not consider themselves bound to any greater discretion, and freely recounted the episodes, half amorous, half literary, of the correspondence. When the tale came to the ears of Lucien his self-love was wounded to the quick. He strongly condemned all indiscretions, especially when he was concerned or prejudiced. Thus, anger overwhelming every spark of his former sympathy, Lucien promised himself revenge when the moment arrived.

The occasion came quickly. Ouvrard, the famous banker, whose business was as important as Récamier's, gave a fête in his domain of Raincy. This property formerly belonged to the Dukes of Orléans, and Ouvrard bought it when it was sequestrated by the State. A large company gathered together. Fifty guests were seated round a table, which was marvellously appointed. They were for the most part drawn from the society of the Directory and the world of finance—Madame Récamier's world in fact. She, more beautiful than ever, sat enthroned on the right of

[1] This is confirmed by Napoleon in his *Mémorial*. He writes that in 1806 he knew Monsieur Récamier, who had been " in bankruptcy for some time."

[2] *Souvenirs et Correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 29. The first Consul was intractable with regard to the bankers, and forced them to make restitution to the State. (*See* Bourrienne, *Mémoires*, Vol. VI., Chap. XIII.)

the giver of the feast. On his left was Madame Tallien, his mistress. Lucien Bonaparte sat exactly opposite this charming group. The dinner was very gay. Each guest exerted himself to honour the hospitality of the wealthy contractor, who knew so well how to entertain. The generous wines from the cellars of Raincy unloosed every tongue. One guest, drunk at the sight of bright eyes as well as by glasses of champagne, proposed to drink to all the pretty women present. The suggestion was immediately carried out. Another remarked that it was hardly gallant to forget the pretty women who were absent, particularly those they loved. Amidst general laughter they then drank the toast of the absent ones. Lucien Bonaparte was always an admirer of the sex, and these toasts inspired him. He got up in his turn. As he never touched anything but water his self-possession was complete. He lifted his glass.

"I ask you to drink to the most beautiful of women," he said.

Madame Récamier was immediately the object of every glance. Delighted at the mute suffrage of this admiration, which gave her a triumph over her neighbour, Madame Tallien, delighted also to see that the First Consul's brother was relenting, she modestly cast down her eyes and blushed.

"Give us the name of this most beautiful of women!" cried the guests in chorus.

"Well, gentlemen!" replied Lucien. "Her name is Peace, the peace we desire so much!"

Lucien tells this anecdote himself, together with many others which honour Romeo more than Juliette. He adds that the toast was received very gaily and sincerely by all, with the exception perhaps of Madame Récamier. He was amused at her discomfiture, and he states as an excuse, that he thought he had the right to humiliate her coquetry.[1] I will not contradict him. But Madame Récamier was beginning to understand that the rôle of the most beautiful woman in Paris was not without its inconveniences.

[1] Jung. *Lucien Bonaparte et ses mémoires*, Vol. I., p. 280. *Bonaparte et son temps*, Vol. III., p. 227, note.

It has been said that Madame Récamier opened her salon to " every opinion and every class of society, with this difference, that, hearing nothing but political discussion, she endeavoured to bring the various parties together."[1]

This is saying too much. Madame Récamier opened her doors to every one whose presence might flatter her vanity or add to her influence. At first her salon was more worldly and frivolous than political, in spite of the conclusions to be drawn from the attendance of such men as Moreau, the two Montmorencys and Bernadotte. If she did not listen to the political conversation, she cleverly kept in touch with the little politics of the drawing-room, by means of which a beautiful woman, or one reputed to be beautiful, with some inclination for intrigue, more ambition than intelligence, and more cunning than dignity, is able to establish her empire over the men who surround her.

Quickly tired of a taste for dress, an inclination that reduces so many women to little more than mannequins, Madame Récamier understood that such an attraction was only of value in the eyes of the foolish, and she had not the wish to form one of that flock. She foresaw, at first only vaguely, that her beauty and fortune would enable her to play a leading part. This thought kept her intelligence alert. She cleverly awaited the course of events, and neglected nothing that might help to establish her dawning power.

During the uncertain period of the Directory and the Consulate, when no man knew what shape the Government of the next day might assume, Madame Récamier very skilfully brought together under her roof the heads of all the opposed parties. On this account she has been praised. Regarding her action more closely, she does not merit so much commendation. As she was physically feeble, so her opinions were weak. She did not receive these amiable familiars of her salon because she possessed a broad mind and a benevolent tolerance. Her reason was simply that they were likely to be of use to her. Her high sentiments, her

[1] Louis Lacour. *Grand monde et salons politiques de Paris*, p. 76.

patriotic desire to reconcile the politicians, thus appear under a very different aspect. Her tact must be recognised, for she was able to bring together in apparent agreement men of the most contrary tendencies. Society was composed of pieces and fragments that did not precisely vibrate with an excessive sympathy. Harmony (always a feature to be desired in any réunion) reigned in Madame Récamier's house, and the men who agreed not to disturb her serenity are more to be praised than their hostess.

Amongst those who had been connected with Monsieur and Madame Bernard was Barère. They were under great obligations to him. As with the rest of the world, Madame Récamier was on terms of friendship with this well-known Parisian, and he often invited her to dinner. One day he found himself seated at table by the side of La Harpe. In spite of his difficult nature, the author appreciated nothing so much as good manners, for he had long since hidden his own red bonnet in his pocket. After the dinner he went to Madame Récamier.

"Tell me, dear Madame, who is the man I sat next to at the table? It is impossible not to see from his tone and distinguished manners that he is a man of the old régime."

The young hostess replied with a gracious smile:

"I don't know. He is one of my husband's friends. So many come that I am not able to remember the names of each one."[1]

Monsieur de La Harpe could not believe that a republican existed with good manners and of superior education; yet many had both.

Madame Récamier permitted the greatest liberty, but her visitors never transgressed the conventionalities, and the severest good tone reigned in her salon. Perhaps it was the first drawing-room that banished the coarse joys, the old rabelaisian words not without currency in that world. Her drawing-room was *comme il faut*, as the phrase is understood to-day. Her receptions did not imitate the dinners of Mademoiselle Quinault. If new plays and actresses were

[1] Barère. *Mémoires*, Vol. I., p. 159.

discussed—as, under the reign of Louis XIV. sermons and preachers were debated—politics were rarely touched upon. The burning events of the Revolution were too close. All the women, even those with more wit than virtue, as Madame Hamelin, were influenced by this discreet atmosphere, English, if you like, but not very amusing. It created a certain manner of speaking, in whispers behind a fan. Madame Récamier always had the air of imparting a confidence. In reality she was a mistress of the art of receiving confidences. Since royalists of mark frequented her house it is beyond doubt that she wished to have the honour of restoring in her salon the traditions and conversation of the salons of the monarchical régime, reflections of which she had seen at her mother's from 1789 to 1792. The idea was well conceived. The royalists who had returned after the emigration, as well as those who had been unable to leave France, were to a great extent ruined, and could not dream of opening salons. There was no better manner of reigning in society. In receiving the celebrated men of her time, or those who carried the oldest family names, her sovereignty became more effective. She had but to ask a favour of men standing well with the Government, and the thing was done. If she recommended a person for employment, he obtained the office he wanted. She was nobody's mistress, yet by such skilful manœuvres she became a power, not occult, but composed of a thousand invisible threads. They could not be seen, but they existed none the less, and possibly for this very reason were all the stronger.

Next to flattery, one of the secrets of government is benevolent goodwill. Madame Récamier's goodwill was excessive. She suppressed almost all criticism or inquiry. She never had "those vigorous hates which stain with vice the souls of virtue."

Madame Récamier knew that it was fashionable to appear charitable, and she followed the fashion. If good was only done by men and women of feeling the poor would run a risk of dying from hunger. Madame Récamier spoke well of everybody. She knew by instinct, rather than by

education, that malice is generally clumsy, and that a woman ought to be good even from calculated motives. At the same time she refused to tolerate slander and backbiting any more than the spirit of detraction, which dominated other salons. These precautions were extremely clever, for unless epigram and mockery had been proscribed, she could never have brought together men of the various parties. The task was not easy. She had trouble now and again when some bitter tongue was too eager to utter a malicious remark. General Sébastiani, who, as the colonel of a fine regiment of dragoons, had taken a decisive part in the success of the *coup d'état* of Brumaire, was a visitor. He was conceited and ridiculous. One evening he was heard to say :

" Go and listen to the officers and men of my regiment. They are always saying to each other, ' Colonel Sébastiani is a handsome lad, it's true, but he is very brave ! ' " He pronounced the last word with the broadest of accents. When he left his remark was imitated on every side. This distressed Madame Récamier, who, with a soft air, interrupted : " No, no. You are wrong. You must not become so mocking ! How can you find such pleasure in running him down ? I assure you that Monsieur Sébastiani is not ridiculous——"

" No ! " retorted a smart voice. " But he is so braaave ! "

Every one laughed in spite of the deprecating smile of the mistress of the house.

It is very difficult to draw an exact picture of Madame Récamier's salon under the Consulate. Through her doors passed an interminable procession of all the most distinguished actors who were remodelling a new society. In this crowd she received each comer with a flattery so eager that one of her admirers said with some show of jealousy that she had " an equal preference for every one."[1]

In recruiting her followers she was actuated by curiosity and interest alone, though she saw only friends, or those to whom she gave the name. She showered amiabilities, she

[1] Général de Thiard. *Souvenirs diplomatiques et militaires.*

accentuated them. In leaving the house her visitors were enthusiastic, and chanted her praises throughout a Paris which could only admire her as she passed along its streets in her carriage. Her modesty was not satisfied until all Paris noticed it. She wished the whole city to know that she was as modest as beautiful.

Madame Récamier was careful in sending out invitations to her salon. She had good reason. She did not wish to embarrass herself with the vulgar when she was able to gather together the most distinguished people in the metropolis. With regard to the women she was not so difficult to please. She had not forgotten the liberty that ruled the society of the court under Louis XVI., as well as the freedom of the Revolution and the salon of Barras. In addition, she was still quite young. The idea never occurred to her to sweep from her house some of the women of the world of finance whose gallantry was too outrageous. Her reputation for benevolence increased, because of her great indulgence. Her husband's interests had to be considered. She could not indulge in a series of executions as General Bonaparte did, when, upon becoming First Consul of the French Republic, he did not hesitate to dismiss many of his wife's circle. The purification was to come later, and even then not harshly. In the meanwhile Madame Récamier mixed in the most diverse societies of Paris, but, as she traversed them she left floating behind a fine and discreet perfume of distinction, which gave her a reputation of being a superior woman. She had been intimate with the most frivolous and the most corrupt women of that period of transition. Now, as order was beginning to regain its old authority, she commenced to hold them at a distance. The difference was very slight, but it was noticed. She was prudent, and she appeared able to guess the tone of the morrow. If she had friends she did not care for, business friends, friends of necessity, or simply of utility, such as Lucien Bonaparte, she had also affinities, and at the same time friends who advertised her and helped her schemes of ambition. These were the people who came nearest to her heart.

As if her Parisian triumphs, her drawing-room campaign of Italy, were not sufficient, Madame Récamier wished her glory to radiate across Europe. She sought the many celebrated foreigners who visited Paris in such numbers during the Consulate. Monsieur de Lucchesini, the Prussian minister, visited her every day. The Russians and the English were invited upon the moment of their arrival, and they in turn brought their friends. Soon the house in the Rue du Mont Blanc had to submit to an invasion of distinguished strangers. To each fresh visitor Madame Récamier said:

"Would you like to see my room?"

And passing her arm amiably through his, she conducted him thither. All the other men present followed in procession. A German gives an interesting description of a Monday reception.

"Dancers were not lacking at Madame Récamier's ball," he writes. "But the place itself was at fault. There was such a crowd that it was almost impossible to organise dances. Very few took part in them. The others desired to admire the marvels *di primo cartello*, or to study the graces of the famous dancers, such as Monsieur de Trénis. To do so they climbed upon the chimney-pieces and the chairs in order to see.

"There was an extraordinary collection of foreigners. As usual the English and the Russians were in a majority. I had never seen such wonderful toilettes. Madame Récamier was almost alone in her simple white costume, but, with her hair in ringlets—a true masterpiece—she was delicious. The Russians and the Poles, sparkling with jewels, were eclipsed by a splendid Englishwoman. Nobody was able to tell me her name.

"As for the young Englishmen who had left their island for the first time, it is impossible to imagine beings more clumsy and awkward. As they are always very numerous at these gatherings, one cannot fail to remark their maladroit behaviour.

"Towards the morning I felt suffocated, but I was

not able to persuade the friend who had brought me that it was time to go. I found myself in front of the alert antiquary Millin. Suddenly he remembered that somebody was about to execute a Spanish dance. "That must be seen!" he said. And, turning on his heel, he took me towards a room where a circle had already formed. In the middle was an ugly little woman with a pair of castanets. Some time elapsed before everything was ready. The orchestra had to play an accompaniment which it did not know. Room had to be found for the music books. At last all was arranged and finished. In order to remain in the front rank of the spectators, Millin and I lent our shoulders to the musicians, who hooked their books on to us. The dancer succeeded very well with her bolero. It was three o'clock when we left."[1]

Later Madame Récamier gave up these huge crowds. But at that moment it was the fashion. They did not think they could properly amuse themselves if the mob was not thick enough to prevent dancing, if each visitor did not stand upon every other visitor's feet, if they were not stifled for hours, pressed one against the other like herrings in a barrel. Madame Récamier was in some degree responsible for this bad fashion. She gave the tone to Society, and she allowed her balls to be overcrowded.

Firmly established in her proud position as the reigning arbiter of the mode, she gradually eliminated from her "Mondays" many of her earlier friends. Her influence increased as her invitations became more difficult to obtain.[2] She formed an inner circle, devoted friends, but chiefly chosen from the royalist party. In this manner she got together her *entourage* during the period of the Consulate.

She had not been able to open up any relationship with the First Consul. She was embroiled with Lucien. For these reasons she saw less of Madame Baciocchi, and was not so

[1] Reichardt. *Un hiver à Paris sous le Consulat*, p. 217-220.

[2] The English newspaper, *The Argus*, which was printed at Paris, announced during January the chief Parisian receptions, including those of Madame Récamier, Madame Junot, etc. (Sir John Carr. *Les Anglais à Paris après la paix d'Amiens*, p. 74.)

ready to extend her invitations to the generals attached to the little court at the Tuileries. She became more friendly with Moreau and Bernadotte, which created a state of almost public latent hostility in her salon against the Consular government. The First Consul took such offence that the young queen of finance was officially warned, and felt obliged to discontinue her "Monday" assemblies. The opposition lost nothing. She joined forces with the newly-married Moreau who, with his wife, wished to make his salon a political centre. Hardly had the new salon been opened than the rough arrest of the general closed the house.

Madame Récamier widely lamented this abuse of governmental authority, which pushed its police inquisitions into the most intimate and peaceful drawing-rooms. She seized the occasion to profit from the incident, and took some rest from an activity which was beginning to wear her out. The tyranny of the First Consul thus gave her a little liberty, which she employed in the best possible manner. She had profited to make the acquaintance of the most remarkable men of her time. Amongst them was the old painter, Hubert-Robert. She went to his studio and worked at landscape-sketching. "Draped in her *égyptienne*, trimmed with furs," wrote a stranger who met her there, "her beautiful curls negligently pushed aside from her face, her flexible body bent towards the drawing-board which her charming hand skimmed over, her soft glances flitting to and fro, from the design to her humble admirer. Assuredly Madame Récamier was an exquisite jewel in the atelier of the old artist."[1]

She was seized with such an inclination for drawing that she asked Hubert-Robert to cede her a corner of his studio where she might pass the whole day. The artist was so enchanted that he allowed her to do everything she wished. Quickly she transformed her part of the studio with draperies, small pieces of furniture, plants, books, a bed to rest upon, and a piano. With these instruments Madame Récamier was able to indulge in her art studies.

[1] Reichardt. *Un Hiver à Paris sous le Consulat*, p. 217.

MA
*After the pa*

*Photo: W. A. Mansell & Co.*

RÉCAMIER
*y David in the Louvre*

About this period David undertook her portrait, now in the Louvre. Madame is represented resting on a couch. The delightful undulation and exquisite suppleness of her body are accentuated by the artist. It is impossible to refrain from admiring the voluptuous curves that are brought into such clear relief. Yet the impression is that of ice. Her feet are uncovered. She believed them to be beautiful. Mérimée treated them irreverently, and called them ugly. They did not show her fine taste, but it was not David's fault. Madame Récamier never walked. Whenever she took the air it was in her carriage. But she was so convinced of the beauty of her feet that she carefully posed them for David's benefit, as later she posed them so that Gérard might not fail to be influenced.

People spoke much about these things. They talked continually about her. If she went to a dinner or a ball, and she attended these functions every day, the next morning every one was commenting upon her toilette. As it was settled that she dressed only in white, the world was curious to learn what fresh fashion she had given to her robe, her corsage, and her coiffure. Her contemporaries agreed that her most triumphant toilette was a white satin robe trimmed with gold garnitures, which admirably enhanced her particular style of beauty. This marvel remained a topic of conversation for some long while, and more than one young woman endeavoured to copy her. Those who had seen her became extremely proud, and despised the vulgar who had not been admitted to the same honour.

These assemblies, under her own roof or elsewhere, occupied her nights, until the suspicions of the police compelled her to put a bridle upon her fashionable pleasures. Otherwise she might have died of fatigue ; for it was only by sleeping all day that she was enabled to dance and talk all the night. Thus, like many other women, Madame Récamier turned day into night. After every fête, that is to say every day, she rose at four o'clock in the afternoon, took her bath, and dressed. If any visitor, ignorant of her habits, presented himself before five, the porter explained : " Madame's day

has not yet commenced." This was the phrase that politely intimated to visitors that they had arrived too soon.

When the First Consul prepared the Concordat, in order to judge the public feeling as to the re-establishment of the church, he decided that the Easter fêtes of 1801 should be celebrated in the church of Saint Roch. In organising them the parish priest did not forget the collections, but knew not whom to select for collector.

Where could he find a lady who, by reason of her family and knowledge of the world, would be likely to attract most gold in the pious moneybags? Whose smiles would best unloosen the purses? The priest was told that Madame Récamier seemed born for such a rôle. She had begged for the poor on a previous occasion and gathered seven hundred francs. Immediately he asked Madame Récamier to act as collector in his church. She accepted. A returned emigrant, Monsieur de Thiard, was her cavalier. The task was no sinecure. To walk round the church through the enormous crowd occupied more than an hour. Another hour was occupied in counting the receipts, which amounted to twenty thousand francs. From each lip came a cry of admiration at the marvellous beauty of the young collector. As she advanced step by step through the church these cries were translated into pieces of gold for the poor, and many pieces of verse to offer to the fair collector.[1]

The Peace of Amiens, destined to be of short duration, had been signed. The English flocked to Paris, and Madame Récamier welcomed them. They assured her that she would be heartily received in London, and she decided to make the journey, as Madame de Boufflers and the Parisian world of fashion had done after the peace of 1763. Her husband's name was known in business circles, and an Englishman remarked that "his letters would receive the greatest credit, above all if *she* presented them."[2]

[1] The full details will be found in General De Thiard's *Souvenirs diplomatiques et militaires.*

[2] Sir John Carr. *Les Anglais en Paris après la paix d'Amiens,* p. 117.

But Madame Récamier did not intend frequenting the business circles. She provided herself with letters of introduction from the old Duc de Guignes, who had been ambassador in London thirty years before. These opened to her the mansions of the Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Melbourne, Lady Salisbury, and the Margravine of Anspach. In his memoirs Chateaubriand speaks with complaisance of the prodigious admiration and homage Madame Récamier received in London. She certainly enjoyed far more success than the Comtesse de Boufflers. Madame Lenormant has not forgotten a single incident, and she lays stress upon the admiration of the Prince of Wales. As she says, " the English journals were occupied for several weeks in registering the doings and gestures of this fashionable foreigner."[1] Witnesses testify to the truth of this statement. A French emigrant in London wrote : " When an Englishman admits that a Frenchwoman is beautiful, she must at least be equal to the most seductive and most exquisite creations of Praxiteles, Apelles, Raphael, and Titian. Well, over Madame Récamier the Londoners became enthusiastic and mad. In the theatres, as soon as it was known that she was in her box, every eye turned from the stage to her. All the attention and all the applause was for the beautiful Frenchwoman."

" The first Monday in May, when the whole of London walks in Kensington Gardens to signalise the beginning of spring, Madame Récamier appeared in the midst of the crowd. Following the French fashion of the moment, she wore on her hat a veil of lace, "*à l'Iphigénie*"; this veil came to the ground, thus enveloping the woman who carried it in a white cloud. John Bull, not by habit courteous or gallant, went down on his knees, and respectfully lifted the long veil which hid the young foreigner's beauty from his sight. With the soft grace she alone possessed, Madame Récamier excused herself from the exaggeration of this homage, and the charm she employed added to the delight of the populace."[2]

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier.* Vol. I., p. 101.
[2] Vicomte Walsh. *Souvenirs de cinquante ans.*

After having passed through Holland, she returned to Paris, where she recognised the politeness of the English by receiving them during the following winter with greater flattery than before. This winter of 1802-1803 was exceptionally active, and the foreign colony largely contributed to the brilliance and animation of the fêtes.

It was perhaps the brightest portion of Madame Récamier's career. Round her gathered the greatest names of the time, and in addition all the ministers of Bonaparte. This gave rise to the First Consul's humorous remark :

" When was a council last held at Madame Récamier's ? "[1]

[1] Chateaubriand. *Mémoires d'outre tombe.* Vol. IV., p. 399.

## CHAPTER IV

REPUBLICANS as well as Royalists recognised that Bonaparte was striving for absolute power. His aims were proved by the suppression of the tribunate, and the decrees issued directly he was elected Consul for life. These were measures restrictive of all liberty. The Royalists were less eager to combine against Bonaparte's tyranny than the Republicans, probably because they considered his power merely temporary. But they discussed their hopes with Madame Récamier, and fully agreed with the daily cry of the Montmorency : " This will soon end ! "

Several events contributed to estrange Madame Récamier from the Bonapartes. She, too, believed that the First Consul's power would quickly wane. She had quarrelled with Lucien, Madame de Staël had been exiled, and her father, Monsieur Bernard, held under arrest. Her intimacy with members of the oldest families of France flattered her more than might be imagined. The Revolution was too recent for the line of demarcation between the nobility and the middle classes to be effaced. This deprived the parvenue of a victory she ardently desired a few months earlier. She lost the triumph of enlisting the Emperor amongst her admirers. In 1804, when Bonaparte carried all before him, overthrowing every obstacle to his will, and proclaiming himself Emperor, her latent hostility became more bitter.

It was not the first time that Madame Récamier had mixed in politics. Benjamin Constant wrote : " Monsieur de Montmorency confided in her, and painted the Restoration of the Bourbons in colours vivid enough to excite her

enthusiasm. He asked her to bring together Bernadotte and Moreau, two men of importance, to see if they would unite against Bonaparte. The chance of exercising her power is always welcome to a young woman. Any scheme exciting men of dignity and glory against the despotism of Bonaparte suggested a generous and noble inspiration. This tempted Madame Récamier."[1] Her previous lack of success with the First Consul still wounded her. The proposals made by Adrien and Mathieu de Montmorency were eagerly accepted.

The unforeseen arrest of Moreau fell like a thunderbolt amongst Madame de Récamier's friends. They feared that the same fate would befall Bernadotte, who had in Juliette's own salon conspired with her against the First Consul. They did not know that the crafty Gascon had made his terms with Bonaparte at the last moment. Madame Récamier believed that she also was threatened; but nothing happened, her courage revived, and she went about as usual. She spent her days with Madame Moreau; she attended the general's trial. When Moreau noticed her presence, he rose and bowed. She returned his salutation. Upon leaving the chamber he was even able to exchange a few words with her.

The First Consul was informed of Moreau's action. He displayed some temper, and Cambacérès warned Madame Récamier not to return to the trial. So she occupied herself in consoling Madame Moreau.

This action stands to her lasting credit. Admittedly she was an interested party, for the influence of the Montmorencys had converted her to the royalist faction. Her personal grudges against the First Consul cannot be forgotten. Yet Madame Récamier must be praised for refusing to abandon her friends in adversity. At that period such loyalty required courage. The conduct of the beautiful Juliette harmonised with her own charms.

Time did not appease the wrath of Madame Récamier and her friends at the condemnations that followed Moreau's

[1] Chateaubriand. *Mémoires d'outre tombe.* Vol. IV., p. 299.

trial. The execution of the Duc d'Enghien revived her resentment, but the feeling was moderated by respect for conventionality. She could not be more angry than the etiquette of society permitted. Some sentiments, however strong, cannot be paraded before the world. Hate, as well as love, must be suppressed. Passions that rise above mediocrity are misunderstood.

In spite of these political events, Madame Récamier continued to receive her friends with her accustomed smiles and grace. Her only answer to the veiled allusions of her circle was a gesture of heart-breaking impotence. She raised her eyes to the sky with an indefinable air, which gave her an additional beauty. Then the conversation would drop to its ordinary level, and the less compromising affairs of the day were discussed. She was told that the printsellers exhibited her portrait in their windows by the side of the First Consul, but the artist had obscured her features by a veil.[1] She smiled, and replied ingenuously that she had already noticed it. Mathieu de Montmorency spoke of a portrait of Bonaparte that had given rise to gossip. The First Consul held a sword in one hand, and a cross in the other. Faith presented him with a branch of palms. The devout Montmorency could not agree that Faith was able to crown with palms any ruler of France other than a Bourbon. He forgot that the Comte de Provence, and the Comte d'Artois, had shocked the nation by their profligacy and irreligion. Mathieu then asked Madame Récamier if she continued to go to church. She replied that she went to Mass every morning. In spite of the answer, he delivered an edifying little lecture. A German had recently arrived in Paris distinguished for his intelligence, and famous through his writings. Kotzebue

[1] Kotzebue. *Souvenirs de Paris en* 1804. Chapter IV. of the first volume is devoted to Madame Récamier. Caricatures of the beautiful Juliette were issued. Kotzebue tells us that in a print shop she was given one to her great astonishment. "This person," she said to the printseller, "has possibly a bad reputation?" "No, madam, her reputation has not a stain." He commenced to praise the subject of the picture. She blushed prettily as she afterwards recited this adventure—which perhaps never happened.

renewed his assurances of affection. He begged to be allowed to accompany her in some idyllic country excursion. They decided to visit the tombs of Saint Denis, where he would have every opportunity to continue his declarations.

Benjamin Constant had been newly introduced. He was a scoffer, sometimes bitter, but always sprightly except in conduct. General Sébastiani's intelligence limited itself to an affection of intelligence. Every effort revealed his fatuity. Other young men rivalled him in this respect so closely that Benjamin Constant described them as "sneering too much and truly stupid."[1] As a whole, however, the circle was very agreeable. Madame Hamelin showed herself rarely. Madame Récamier evidently did not wish to open her doors to ladies whose virtue was tarnished, particularly as it was whispered that the director who controlled the conscience of the salon was called Saint Matthew. Madame Hamelin felt herself out of place before all this religion in the Rue du Mont Blanc. But she promised herself that she would have a revenge for the petty mortifications the new fantasy compelled her to suffer.

Madame Hamelin was decidedly not a woman to admit freely. Her scandalous liaisons had given her a reputation for gallantry. Monsieur de Montrond could hardly be invited by honest people. The two lived together in the Rue Blanche. Their resources were mysterious, and not to be boasted about. Tired of Madame Hamelin, Monsieur de Montrond, who later was to be so well snubbed by the Duchesse d'Abrantès, tried to court Madame Récamier. With her usual goodwill she insensibly allowed him to continue, until the coxcomb took the habit of calling on her every day. Troubled by his regular absences at a certain hour, Madame Hamelin decided to discover the reason. She did not abase herself by following her lover, or even by putting a servant on his track. Her scheme was far more original. She begged Montrond to lend her his phaeton and horses for a day.

[1] Benjamin Constant. *Journal Intime*, p. 108.

"It is a caprice," she explained, "but a caprice I absolutely must satisfy, like all the others."

"But, my friend, you forget that I need my horses."

"And I also need them!"

In short, she was so insinuating, and also so imperious, that she gained her point.

Mounted in the phaeton, Madame Hamelin picked up the reins, flicked the horses with the whip, and then allowed them to go as they wished. They were so accustomed to the road from the Rue Blanche to the Rue du Mont Blanc that they took it mechanically, and stopped of their own accord in front of No. 7. It was the entrance to the Hôtel Récamier.

"Ah!" she cried. "This is the place. But the fact does not worry me."

This adventure is related by General de Bonneval in his memoirs, and, with some variations, is to be found also in General Thiébault's memoirs. The two recitals prove that the visits of Monsieur de Montrond to Madame Récamier gave rise to much chatter. But why did the illustrious patroness of all coquettes, past, present and to come, receive Monsieur de Montrond, the former husband of Mademoiselle Aimée de Coigny, and the future lover of the Princess Pauline? Simply because he was the most admired "bad boy" of his time. He professed a scorn for all women, and women love rakes, having a predilection for those by whom they are despised.

Whatever may have been said of the relations of Monsieur de Montrond and Madame Récamier, her reputation was never in danger. There are people who are permitted to do anything they choose. This truth does not honour the impartiality of our judgments, nor add to the uprightness of worldly men.

The Empire was proclaimed on May 4, 1804. The Coronation was fixed for December 2 of the same year. Without waiting for that ceremony the Emperor formed his own establishment, as well as those of the Empress, of his mother, and of the princesses, his sisters. This created considerable sensation in the drawing-rooms. In Madame

Récamier's house, after debating the consequences that would ensue from the rupture of the Peace of Amiens, comments were made upon the nominations of the Tuileries. Some of the appointments were astonishing. Madame Récamier was even more surprised when Fouché, Minister of the Police, demanded an interview. He was an assiduous friend who had rendered her a thousand services. Laughingly, she replied with an invitation to lunch on the following day.

Fouché was punctual. He commenced by telling his hostess how much he deplored the appearance of opposition given to her salon by the royalist emigrants who frequented it. He added that if she had really any hostility towards the Emperor she was very ungrateful, for he had given Monsieur Bernard, her father, his liberty. Had justice been allowed to take its course, Bernard would have been in an awkward position. In addition, she was not acting cleverly, for the Emperor being all-powerful, there was no reason to anger him. In conclusion he recommended prudence.

Madame Récamier paid as little attention to his reprimand as to his counsel. She protested that there was no political discussion under her roof, but that she was not able to prevent her friends from carrying the family names of the old monarchy. Seditious intentions could hardly be argued from this fact.

Some days later the Minister of Police returned to Clichy, and walked in the park with Juliette. He said that the Emperor had been speaking about her, and he wished to understand her true sentiments towards the sovereign. She answered by relating what a bad impression the execution of the Duc d'Enghien had created upon her. She complained of the exile of her dear friend, Madame de Staël and of General Moreau. Fouché interrupted brusquely.

" This is stupidity," he cried. " You are wrong to take up so hostile an attitude. Come over frankly to our side, and ask the Emperor to appoint you *dame du palais* to the Empress. That is your proper place. Think it over well.

Consider your own interest, and the well-being of your friends. If you are charitably inclined, think of all the good you could do in so high a position."

He enlarged upon the idea for some while, and then returned to Paris, leaving Madame Récamier in the utmost surprise at the proposal. The same evening she repeated the minister's proposition to her friends. Fearing that she would pass over to the enemy they advised her that it would be a grave imprudence to become allied to a man who was not the head of a party. "Bonaparte has come to the top by a trick," they protested. "Terror and assassination have helped him to obtain the mastery of France. His end will be as rapid as his rise. England, Austria, Russia and Prussia are in arms. His downfall can be but the affair of a few months. A little patience, and the King must return. With such friends as the Montmorency, the Lamoignon, and others, Madame Récamier would be offered the highest posts at the court of a legitimate monarch. She would certainly be given the precedence of a duchess."

This conversation impressed Madame Récamier. She determined to be wise, but not in Fouché's sense. Foolishly she had been dallying with ambitious thoughts. These she sternly rejected.

A few days elapsed. She was invited to lunch at Neuilly with the Princess Caroline, sister to the Emperor. She found Fouché already there. Upon rising from the table, they walked in the park. A well-informed chronicler gives us the facts.

"The Minister of Police, as if by chance, returned to the idea he had already submitted, and repeated that he wished to see her attached to the household of the Empress."

"But I don't wish it," she replied softly and suavely, not desiring to wound by a refusal the occult power that loomed in the shadow.

"You answer like a child," said Fouché. "The Emperor wants a guide, a friend. Where do you think he can find one? Is it amongst the wives of his generals? That is impossible. There would be scandal!"

" And why are you kind enough to consider me exempt from gossip ? "

" That is very different. You are as young as the other women, but your position in the world since your marriage has made your reputation ; you could be the Emperor's friend, for it is a friend he wants and not a mistress."

" In thus speaking the wicked man fixed on her his little eyes, which seemed to grow smaller as they contemplated the form and features of this Psyche, with her native modesty and ravishing expression.

" I know the needs of the Emperor's heart," he continued. " He is unhappy because he is not understood. Often he would give the moments of his victories, the noisy acclamations which stupefy the ear without touching the soul, for some minutes of amicable conversation, some words of sweet confidence. Then he can never pass a day without a scene of odious jealousy. Such torments he would not be compelled to submit to in a pure and holy friendship such as that I wish to establish between you both ! "

Madame Récamier was not convinced. " How are you able to assure me that this arrangement would suit the Emperor and the Empress ? And then—I repeat it to you —I love my liberty."

" Great Heavens, you will have it ! Who talks to you of any trying servitude ? You will be the friend of the Empress, but above all the friend of the Emperor. The friend of Napoleon ! Consider well what I am proposing to you."[1]

The Princess Caroline, who had remained in the background, now joined them. Fouché repeated the conversation to her.

" What a good idea ! How happy I should be to see you as my brother's friend. Accept ! " she cried.

She pleaded warmly on behalf of Fouché's proposal. Before leaving she asked Madame Récamier to name her favourite theatre. Upon the reply that it was the Comédie-Française. " Well," she said, " permit me to offer you my box, you will use it ? You promise me ? "

[1] Duchesse d'Abrantès. *Mémoires*, Vol. VII., p. 422.

The next morning Madame Récamier received a ticket from the princess placing a box at her entire disposition. The box was opposite the Emperor's, and Madame Récamier used it twice. Each evening the Emperor visited the theatre and gazed at her through his opera-glasses during the whole performance. This gave rise to much gossip, but Fouché was not satisfied. Again he returned to the charge, declaring that the Emperor himself would offer her the position of *dame du palais*. His efforts were in vain. Madame Récamier consulted her husband, as she had previously asked his advice with regard to Lucien. Récamier left his wife free to act as she wished. Mathieu de Montmorency told her that the Emperor had insulted the laws, outraged Liberty, and must soon reach his doom. These remarks influenced her decision. In the past she had unsuccessfully endeavoured to approach the First Consul. Now she refused to become the Emperor's friend. In his anger, Fouché could not hide his disgust, and never entered her house again.

Another unpleasant disgrace overtook Juliette. Her niece writes that "the affairs of Monsieur Récamier had never been more prosperous, or more widely extended." [1] The Emperor on the contrary considered that the bank at this moment had been "failing for some time," [2] owing to the extravagance of the "beauty of beauties," who lived at the rate of £24,000 a year. It is certain that the banker's affairs could not have been over-prosperous. When the question of Lucien Bonaparte's passion was discussed (and Madame Lenormant is our authority), Récamier admitted that "to break openly with a man so highly placed would gravely compromise him, and possibly ruin the bank." The situation must have been menacing. Owing to a combination of causes, the Bank of France passed through a severe crisis during the last days of 1805. The public funds depreciated owing to the manœuvres of speculators, with Ouvrard at their head. Many persons were ruined. The Récamier Bank quickly reached the end of its resources and

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 120.
[2] *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, Vol. III., p. 211.

its ready money. In a state of piteous agitation, Monsieur Récamier sought his young wife. In a broken voice he told her that his business was desperate. If the Bank of France were not authorised within the next forty-eight hours to lend him a million francs (for which he could offer good security), he would be compelled to make up his balance-sheet and close his doors.

The crisis of the Bank of France took place in October, 1805. The house of Récamier fought for a whole year against the disastrous consequences of this panic, and an error in the *Memorial of Saint Helena* must be corrected. The *Memorial* states that during the Austerlitz campaign General Junot complained with heat to the Emperor that the Treasury refused to assist the Récamier bank with a loan of two millions.[1] Junot only arrived from Portugal to join the Emperor on the morning of the battle of Austerlitz. He was not able to make this complaint in December, 1805, for the simple reason that Récamier did not go bankrupt until October, 1806. Probably Junot spoke with vehemence, excited by the unhappiness about to fall upon the woman he loved so deeply.[2] But the date must be corrected to the moment when Junot, recalled from Parma, was named Governor of Paris, and when the Emperor was about to undertake the war with Prussia, succeeded by the Polish campaign, which terminated in 1807 by the Peace of Tilsit.

"I am not in love with Madame Récamier!" was the Emperor's answer to Junot. At any rate he had been in love, or at least had the inclination. If Madame Récamier had agreed to the Emperor's proposal it is probable her husband would not have been made a bankrupt. Many good reasons would have been found to advance from the Bank of France the two millions he lacked.

Madame Récamier had many friends, mostly in very comfortable circumstances. Why did not Madame de Staël,

[1] *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, Vol. III., p. 20-21.

[2] "For a long while I loved her with passion; I have nothing but the friendship of a brother." (*Lettre du général Junot à sa femme.* Duchesse d'Abrantès. *Mémoires*, Vol. VIII., p. 418.)

the Montmorency, the Luynes and Chevreuse, the Lamoignon, and the La Rochefoucauld come to the rescue? Why did not one of these millionaires dream of forming a little company to raise the sum necessary to weather the storm? It would have been easy for them. If fine thoughts come from the heart, as Vauvenargues says, Madame Récamier's friends were only moderately provided. Not one of these amiable egotists, with hearts of papier-mâché, had a thought of devoting himself to the purpose. They consoled themselves for their meanness by praising Madame Récamier's courage in accepting her fate. As the world was not able to commend their generosity it became enthusiastic over their faithful attachment to the ruined goddess. These friends continued to visit her as before, and, as they had nothing better to give, offered their homage. One important fact must not be forgotten. Madame Récamier was enabled to keep her horses. This was a great comfort to everybody. It would have been a public calamity if this woman had been compelled to go on foot—like the others.

Madame Récamier had not recovered from the sorrow of being compelled to renounce her wealthy ease when her mother died. Madame Bernard's health had been slowly failing. The news of her daughter's ruin killed her. Three months after the bankruptcy she succumbed, in despair at the thought of the gloomy future of her child.

Madame Récamier had a deep resentment against the Government that refused to authorise the Bank of France to advance one or two millions of francs to her husband. The sentiment tinged her circle with acrimony. The *coterie* received the name of "the little church," with "Saint Matthew" as the ruling pontiff. It shared the spirit of opposition that dominated the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Thus she gave fresh offence to the Emperor, and his Minister of Police.

Rumour said that Napoleon "was jealous of the effect of her beauty and intelligence." He was not jealous, but he never pardoned the beautiful woman for her three rebuffs. She refused to listen to his propositions, and she would not

accept the post of *dame du palais* or the other high favours he had offered. On his part, Fouché did not forgive her resistance to his wishes in the intimate negotiation with which he had been entrusted. Both he and his master doubted whether Madame Récamier guarded the secret of this singular proposition. They believed that "the little church" would accentuate its hostility, whilst still further incensing its idol. As if her financial ruin were not sufficient for his vengeance, Fouché wanted to banish her from Paris. In a police report he informed the Emperor that she was incorrigible and irreconcilable. He asked for her exile. In the same report he demanded the same punishment for Mesdames d'Avaux and de Chevreuse, and Messieurs de Duras, de Montrond, and others.

Madame Récamier's vanity would have been flattered if she could have seen her name on Fouché's list in such noble company. She would have been willing to suffer with such aristocratic victims. She was not banished, yet she condemned herself to voluntary exile in the provinces. By this action her friends were allowed to believe that she had been martyred by an arbitrary decree. She was also able to hide from the fashionable world, so often dazzled by her brilliant fêtes, that she was no longer financially able to open her doors. This saved her from the bitterness of seeing her house put up for sale, and in the meanwhile of living miserably on a single floor.

Madame de Staël had been exiled from Paris in 1803. She first went to Switzerland, and then, after the death of her father, to Italy. Returning to Coppet in the summer of 1805 a year passed before she re-entered France. Forbidden to come within forty leagues of Paris, she established herself at Auxerre, where Madame Récamier visited her with Benjamin Constant. Afterwards came Adrien and Mathieu de Montmorency. Madame Récamier returned to Paris to discover her husband's bankruptcy, and Madame de Staël sent a letter of cordial sympathy. When Madame de Staël went back to Coppet, she made Madame Récamier promise to join her.

The invitation was a godsend. Without considering that her husband would have nobody to distract him from his worries, she started during the early days of July, 1807. She could not travel without a chevalier. The Comte Elzéar de Sabran, son of the Chevalier de Bouffler's friend, was her companion. The journey was made safely as far as Morez. There an accident threatened the lives of the travellers. The postillion imprudently turned on a roadway edged by a deep ravine, and one of the carriage wheels was wrenched off. The coach was overturned, and horses, postillion, carriage, rolled pell-mell into the ditch amidst a cloud of dust. At last the postillion, who was hurt, tried to extricate the travellers from the coach, which had fallen on its side among the horses. The footman, who had the presence of mind to jump from his seat at the moment of the accident, came to his aid. The travellers had not been seriously injured. Monsieur de Sabran and the maid were more or less bruised. Madame Récamier's foot had been crushed. The horses were not so fortunate. Two out of the four were killed.

Help was sought in a neighbouring village, and, when the damage was repaired, they continued their journey. Coppet was reached without further incident.

The château of Coppet rises on the Swiss side of Lake Leman. The landscape is severe rather than smiling. Trees mask the building on every side. The mansion is not impressive. The façade is simple, lacking architecture and style. It has the outward appearance of a barrack or hospital. The main front does not even face the lake. But there is a consolation for this ugliness. The château is surrounded by marvellous natural beauties. The magic of the scene in which it stands is so enchanting that the visitor is overwhelmed.

Madame de Staël gave her friend an enthusiastic welcome. Madame Récamier frankly recognised Corinne's superiority of mind, and she was loved for the admission. Juliette enjoyed living at Coppet. The company was congenial. The guests were men and women of distinction, in opposition to Napoleon, and admirers of beauty.

Amongst the more interesting visitors at Coppet this year was Prince Augustus of Prussia. The son of Prince Ferdinand, and nephew of Frederick the Great, he had been made prisoner at the Battle of Saalfeld, the first conflict in the campaign of 1806. His brother, Prince Louis, had been killed in the same engagement.

The story of his capture is curious.

"I resolved," wrote Monsieur de Reiset, "not to try to surround the enemy, and we drove them into a marsh from which they found it impossible to extricate themselves. Horses and men stuck in the mud together, and all their efforts to escape were without avail. Disorder soon seized their ranks. I summoned them to surrender, and they laid down their arms. They had much difficulty in reaching us, and most of the officers were compelled to leave their horses behind in the swamp. I was overjoyed on identifying their chief, and to find how important was my capture. I had taken prisoner Prince Augustus of Prussia, together with five hundred foot-soldiers, with whom he was retreating. . . ."[1]

The Prince was sent to Dijon, then to Paris,[2] then to Nancy, and finally to Soissons, where he remained until the autumn of 1807, when he was given permission to return to his own land. On his way he visited Geneva, saw Madame de Staël at Coppet, and accepted her hospitality.

Madame de Staël had known his unhappy brother.[3] They talked about him, about his country, about the misfortunes

[1] Lieutenant-General the Vicomte de Reiset. *Souvenirs*, Vol. I., p. 225.

See the *Correspondance de Napoléon*, Vol. XIV., p. 126, pièce 11,528. A. M. Fouché, Pultusk, December 31, 1806.

[3] "I was living at Berlin," wrote Madame de Staël. "One morning at eight o'clock I was aroused to be told that Prince Louis was on horseback under my windows, asking to be allowed to speak to me. . . . I hastened to rise to go and meet him." (*Dix années d'exil*, p. 98.) Etiquette possibly permitted this behaviour in a prince, although courtesy hardly permitted it to an ordinary person. The Emperor Alexander of Russia understood far better the duties of a gallant man. In 1814 the Duchesse d'Abrantès asked for an audience. The Emperor came to her house to know what she desired.

the Emperor had brought upon the royal house of Prussia, about Europe, about Madame de Staël herself. They soon forgot everything else in speaking of the beautiful traveller who had arrived from Paris.

Madame de Genlis wrote a book, more a novel than a veritable history, having for its subject the idyll of the Prince Augustus and Madame Récamier. She thus recounts their first meeting, speaking of Madame Récamier under the name of Athénaïs.

" The Prince entered the salon on the arm of Madame de Staël. Suddenly the door opened, and Athénaïs came forward. Her elegance, the dazzling brilliance of her beauty, prevented the Prince from recognising her, for he had formed a far different idea. He had imagined a woman renowned for her charms, proud of her success, with a self-assurance and confidence that celebrities usually enjoy. He saw a young and timid woman advance with an air of embarrassment, and many blushes. A softer feeling mingled with his surprise.

" After dinner the party did not leave the house, as the heat was excessive. They walked into the gallery for music until the time came for a promenade. After some rich chords and enchanting harmonies, Athénaïs commenced to sing to the accompaniment of the harp. The Prince was ravished. When she ended, he looked at her with eyes full of inexpressible trouble, crying, " What talent ! "[1]

This extract can hardly be called the fantasy of Madame de Genlis' romantic mind, for Madame Récamier dictated it to the writer during the Restoration.

Prince Augustus had accepted Madame de Staël's hospitality for a few days. Now he spoke no longer of continuing his journey. He forgot everything. He forgot that he had not seen his family for a year, and that in the meanwhile great misfortunes had overwhelmed them and his country. Love was more powerful, and compelled him to shut his eyes to the saddest mourning. Like Rinaldo before Armide, the poor Prince fell foolishly in love with Madame Récamier.

[1] Madame de Genlis. *Athénaïs, ou le Château de Coppet en* 1807.

He was "a superb man, with a very noble presence,"[1] in the full flower of his twenty-seven years. General de Reiset was hardly able to imagine his prisoner of war as otherwise than beautiful. However, Madame Lenormant also writes that he was "remarkably beautiful." Benjamin Constant is less enthusiastic. "The Prince," he wrote, "is what he has always been when love made him unlike other men—common, proud, awkward, and gossipping, with his elbows stuck out, and his nose in the air." But when Benjamin Constant drew this unpleasant sketch he, in his turn, was a lover of Madame Récamier, and consequently the Prince's rival. He could not judge him without prejudice, or speak of him with admiration.

Prince Augustus was tall and well proportioned, with fair hair and blue eyes, and doll-like features. His manners were stiff and arrogant. He might have been taken as the pattern from which all German officers have been fashioned. Madame Récamier caused him so overpowering an emotion that at times he was unable to continue in the same room, and had to take a turn in the park to recover his serenity.

Nothing escaped the sharp eyes of Madame de Staël. She was too expert in the affairs of the heart not to guess the cause. She spoke to her "beautiful friend," as she called Madame Récamier, who, doing her best to appear modest, blushed in a genteel fashion, lifted her eyes for an instant, and answered with a smile.

Deeply in love, Prince Augustus noticed the trouble his presence gave to Madame Récamier. An interchange of regards, a conversation without words, was quickly established between them.

Encouraged by the sentiments he discovered, one day, with timidity and fear, he dared to communicate his own feelings. His lips were eloquent. So were his eyes. Madame Récamier did not look up, and she, who had always smiled, now listened to the end of a passionate declaration. This was the first Prince who had attached himself to her, and she lost her

[1] Lieutenant-General the Vicomte de Reiset. *Souvenirs*, Vol. I., p. 225.

self-control. Both lovers were so swept away that the Prince actually asked her hand in marriage, forgetting that she already owned a husband. Madame Récamier also forgot her husband in that moment of passion. She saw the realisation of all her ambitions, and was obliged to restrain herself in order not to break through her reserve and reply with an immediate "Yes!"

She managed to thank the Prince with much grace for the extreme honour he wished to pay her. Gathering her thoughts together she begged him to allow her time for reflexion. She recalled the fact that she was not free to marry.

"But divorce?" suggested the Prince, who belonged to the Protestant faith, and failed to see any disquieting obstacle in Madame Récamier's marriage.

The "beauty of beauties" fell into a reverie. She was a Catholic, but she had never been married before the altar.[1] It would be easy to rupture a bond that did not exist. Her husband's relationship had never been other than paternal. However, a painful idea obsessed her mind. She had received from Monsieur Récamier many marks of affection. To him she owed fourteen years of a peaceful and brilliant life, surrounded by the most distinguished men and women, and enjoying every luxury. Could she abandon her husband now that he was ruined, aged and crushed by sorrow? She reflected for some while. Finally, vanity and ambition, the most violent feelings of her heart, triumphed. She gave way to the insistence of the Prince, and resolved to ask her husband's permission to marry her lover.

The project was extremely simple, but decidedly injudicious.

Madame de Staël had never denied herself the slightest caprice, and she was no more scrupulous about others than she had been for herself. She never imagined that "the beauty" would act otherwise, and she was no stranger to

[1] Civil marriages contracted during the Revolution were admitted by the Church as equally sacred, on account of the impossibility of obtaining a religious ceremony at the time.

Madame Récamier's determination. Madame de Staël was not distressed at witnessing other hearts engaging in the romance of love under her direction. As an expert psychologist she followed their movements with interest and amusement. She sincerely believed the Prince to be a worthy partner for her friend, and she did her best to further the intrigue. Madame Récamier was willing to follow her advice, and the two lovers made a formal engagement. Their betrothal was solemnised with a rite of the most romantic originality. After exchanging rings the Prince wrote with his blood a promise of eternal love and fidelity. Such a sign of devotion was well calculated to complete the conquest of a heart that was asking for a conqueror.

Returning to the realities of everyday life, and without doubt acting upon the advice of Madame de Staël, Madame Récamier wrote to her husband. She begged him, in the name of the affection he had for her, to consent to the rupture of a bond that existed only upon paper, and which had not received the slightest religious sanction.

Monsieur Récamier was certainly the most accommodating of husbands. He recognised with sorrow that the woman to whom he had given so brilliant an existence did not show herself very grateful. A ruined man, he imagined that she did not wish to share his broken fortunes. He believed that her only aspiration was a title. The heart and character of his wife were revealed to him in a flash, and his reflections were bitter. He answered her request with an exalted and affectionate dignity. He said " that he would consent to the annulment of their marriage if such was her wish. But he appealed to all the noble feelings of her heart, he recalled the affection he had displayed towards her from her childhood,[1] he even expressed regret at having respected susceptibilities and repugnances that had resulted in this thought of separation. Finally he asked that the rupture should take

[1] This supports the rumour that suggested a natural relationship between Monsieur Récamier and Juliette. The report must not be rejected disdainfully and without examination, although the following phrase seems to destroy it.

place, if she persisted in the project, not at Paris but out of France, where he would go to arrange matters with her."[1] He added that the difference of religion was a more serious obstacle in the case of a Prince than with an ordinary individual, and that he would be very astonished if the King of Prussia consented to the marriage on account of the disparity of their rank in life. The honest man looked further than the beautiful Juliette. If every other barrier could be surmounted, he asked if her position at the Court of Prussia would be one proper for the wife of Prince Augustus, if her pride and sense of dignity would be as satisfied as her ambition, and if the volatile young Prince, known in Berlin as "Prince Don Juan," would be likely to remain faithful?

This was a Parthian arrow. It struck home. In the midst of her enchantment, Madame Récamier had never dreamed of these difficulties.

She had not really fathomed the sacrifice she had asked of Monsieur Récamier. He, in replying, had not quite appreciated all the sacrifices she had made for him. Monsieur Récamier expressed a regret at having respected the repugnance of a woman the law had given to him as wife. This was possibly written to turn Juliette from her project in proving to her that he also had sacrificed himself in bowing to her susceptibilities.

These ideas, with many others, threw her into a distressing condition. She felt that Monsieur Récamier was right. She understood that the King of Prussia, as head of his royal house, would never consent to her marriage with Prince Augustus. Belonging to the middle-class, of French nationality and the Catholic religion, she would in addition be a divorced woman. Without considering other dangers and trials looming in the future, she realised that the best step was to renounce the project. The idea only vaguely formed itself in her poor little head. She found it hard to relinquish the thought of becoming a Princess. Her brain was in a whirl.

Still infatuated, she could find no means of extricating

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 141.

herself from the complication. She did not ask Madame de Staël's advice. Corinne had been an untrustworthy councillor, and, in spite of her genius, lacked common-sense. Juliette listened to the promptings of her own despair. She did not wish to put aside her love, and thus render the Prince desperate by a refusal. She could not reject Monsieur Récamier's advice, for she felt that he had spoken with reason. The only solution to this singular situation was death. Lucien Bonaparte had in bygone days suggested this last refuge for the love-lorn, although he had taken good care not to seek it himself. She would take Lucien's remedy. Without further reflection, she wrote to her husband.

" Resolved to quit this life, I take up my pen to tell you that whilst my heart beats I will preserve a remembrance of your kindness. I regret not having been more helpful to you. I rely upon your friendship, of which you have given me so many proofs, to carry out my last wishes. I do not wish my death to break the bonds that attach you to my relations. Be of as much use to them as you are able. Look after Delphine. I promised her mother to guard her happiness ; in confiding her to your care she will lose nothing. Some friends have helped me to establish an orphanage. I wish you to do as much as you are able for the establishment. I recommend to you all the people who have been attached to me. I leave you the lasting thought that I owe all the happiness I have found in this life to you."

" Juliette Recam . . ."

" To Monsieur Récamier."[1]

[1] This unpublished letter, which must take an important place in the psychology of Madame Récamier, has been lent to me by Monsieur Gaston La Caille, the well-known collector of autographs. The document is not dated, but it can belong to no other epoch in her career. I am not able to identify the young woman called Delphine, but the orphanage was a girls' school she had established in the neighbourhood of Saint Sulpice, which was supported by subscriptions she collected from her friends.

Did Madame Récamier really intend to kill herself? Her character was ruled by calculation. She habitually examined her impulses before acting upon them. Her position must have been truly serious if death were the sole deliverer. But she soon proved by her own conduct that actions that ought to end in death usually leave us still alive. Madame de Staël, "who was amused by anything that made her cry," was probably consulted. Her friend could not decently take leave of the world without bidding good-bye to her hostess. She was a guest at Coppet, and decency demanded that she should ask pardon for all the trouble her death was likely to give. At that moment Madame de Staël was not thinking of suicide, as she was later when she found that Monsieur de Barante did not reciprocate her passion. So she quickly persuaded her guest that a sudden death would cause much worry. Prince Augustus would be in such despair that he would certainly follow her example. Did she desire the death of this excellent young man? Did she wish to strike the royal house of Prussia, still mourning the loss of Prince Louis, with another lasting sorrow? Had she considered all her unhappy acquaintances, who, if she disappeared, would no longer know where to pass their evenings? She had not the right to destroy herself. And in giving her this good counsel, Madame de Staël tried to read the secret of this poor soul, and to discover her real feelings. She had scrutinised Benjamin Constant in much the same way when he threatened to blow out his brains because she did not agree with his wish to marry her. Suicide was decidedly the fashion at Coppet, where death was always haunting the path of love. Happily these fantasies left the hostess and her visitors in the most excellent health. Madame de Staël was, above all, an author. She studied the subjects of her books from the life, and her *Essay upon Suicide*, suggested by her conversation with Madame Récamier, was finished in 1810, although it was not published until 1812.

Unable to die, for her friend proved its impossibility by algebraical formula, Madame Récamier found herself con-

demned to live. Her attitude toward Prince Augustus was necessarily delicate. She agreed not to discourage him, but, in order to gain time, she decided to give evasive replies to definite questions. She would, in fact, endeavour to maintain a gentle friendship whilst in reality beating a retreat. His recall to Berlin, on her return to Paris, would end the situation. In the meanwhile, there were many recreations to console the two lovers as they awaited the double cure of time and forgetfulness. The life of the château was extremely animated. Coppet often sheltered thirty guests. Whole days were spent in excursions, and rambles through the park. At night, plays were rehearsed and produced, whilst the conversation at table was sparkling.

Madame Récamier adopted this sensible course after some hours of unreasonableness. She wrote another letter to her husband, which Madame de Staël despatched by express. Without warning the Prince she took care never to be in his company unaccompanied by a third person. Madame de Staël did her best to support her new resolutions. Benjamin Constant, who had joined the party at Coppet, entered into the game.[1] The Prince did not wake up to the little conspiracy, and became impatient at the lack of opportunity of enjoying a *tête-à-tête* with Madame Récamier. Curt by temperament, his manners did not improve. One day, whilst on a riding excursion, he wished to say a word to Madame Récamier. He turned towards Benjamin Constant.

" Monsieur de Constant," he asked, " would you gallop ahead for a little while ? "

It is impossible not to smile at this exhibition of German tact. But although he exerted himself he did not achieve his object. Madame Récamier spoke of an early return to

[1] In an unpublished letter from Madame de Staël to Alexandre Rousselin de Saint-Albin, I find these words : " Coppet, July 29, 1807 . . . Now that Benjamin is here, I have no news of you. I wish that you would come to see me. Madame Récamier is here. The society is very pleasant. From our windows we look upon the most beautiful country in the world, the most beautiful if it contained some inhabitants."

Paris. They exchanged vows of betrothal, and she left Coppet with the determination to let time efface the episode. The Prince started for Berlin.

They wrote to each other. The sorrows of the royal house of Prussia and the sad atmosphere in which it lived, prevented the Prince from immediately announcing to his family that he wished to marry a Frenchwoman. He could not even speak of his love for her. At Berlin his conversation was not about love, but consisted of quarrels with the men he considered responsible for the disasters that had overwhelmed his country.[1] He consoled himself for not talking to his parents about Madame Récamier by writing her violent letters.[2]

However, by a scruple which would honour her, if it were not complicated by more than a suspicion of vanity, Madame Récamier decided to offer the Prince a compensation for her loss. At Coppet she encouraged his love. Having retreated, he must receive an indemnity. With this thought

[1] A letter from Napoleon gives some curious details about these recriminations. "Let it be also said (in the "Moniteur") that Prince Augustus of Prussia, who was taken prisoner at Prentzlow, and who has been for some time at Nancy and Soissons, and later at Coppet, where he paid his court to Madame de Staël, appears to have imbibed there some very bad principles. His conversation, since his arrival at Berlin, is inconceivable. This prince is as big a blusterer as the other officers of his nation, and events do not seem to have corrected him. He accuses Prince Hohenlohe, the Duke of Brunswick, General Blucher, the Prussian army, the King: everybody has done wrong except himself. All that one knows about him is that he was captured in a swamp. He has neither intellect nor generosity. He is a youth without experience, and has no proof to substantiate his outcry against old soldiers who have been the victims of the imperious circumstances of war. We are far from blaming Prince Augustus because he was made a prisoner. Such a fate arrives to the bravest. But when this happens without a wound it calls for justification, and not a general accusation embracing unknown and misunderstood events. This young prince should seek the advice of his worthy father and his dignified mother. It would be of more profit to him than the bad lessons and bad propositions he has listened to at Coppet." *Correspondance de Napoleon*, Vol. XVI., p. 185, pièce 13,379. To Monsieur Maret, Ministerial Secretary of State, Venice, December 6, 1807.

[2] This correspondence is in the hands of Monsieur Léon Lavedan, and will doubtless soon be published.

she had her portrait painted by Gérard and sent to the young Prince.

He received it with transports of joy, and expressed his thanks in very touching language.

" For whole hours I look at this enchanting portrait, and I dream of a happiness which surpasses all that the imagination can offer. What fate is comparable to that of the man you love ? "[1]

Confronted with the ingenuousness of this affection, Madame Récamier felt that the time had arrived to be frank. The Prince must be told that she could not respond. The task was painful, but had to be undertaken. She sent him a refusal, very agreeably worded. To her great regret she must renounce hopes she had so foolishly indulged in. And she gave him the chief reasons.

The Prince was desperate. He tried to induce her to reconsider her decision. Finally he declared that he would be content if she would allow him to see her again. This grace she accorded, but political events prevented their meeting until 1811. The Prince, furious at his disappointment, wrote her some bitter lines. He softened, however, when he learned that a police decree forbade Madame Récamier to approach within forty leagues of Paris.

In spite of war a correspondence continued between the Prince and Madame Récamier. During the summer of 1812, whilst she was at Lyons, Camille Jordan wrote to her asking for an interview. " If," said he, " you have some business to do before you can attend to me I will wait." " But," he added maliciously, " to occupy my time you must let me read an interesting part of your immense collection of letters from the Prince of Prussia."[1]

The misfortunes of the French army opened the way to the enemies' troops. Prince Augustus commanded the Prussian artillery. Half a lover and half a soldier, he offered his military successes as homage to the Frenchwoman he had not ceased to admire. He told her of the fortresses he

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 143.
[1] *Madame Récamier, et les amis de sa jeunesse*, p. 134.

*Photo : Neurdein*

MADAME RÉCAMIER
*After the painting by Gérard in the Louvre*

was besieging, and the number of days in which he hoped to overcome them. A modern Frenchman can hardly imagine how Madame Récamier was able to continue in correspondence with this foreigner who had now become the enemy of her country. Each day he was shedding French blood. Yet she felt no shame in reading letters that related his triumphs and his hopes, in other words the defeat of the French army and the downfall of France. The Prince wrote to her as he would have written to a Prussian, and Madame Récamier did not object to his patriotic expressions. Madame Lenormant finds her attitude natural, and writes: "On his military route, whilst successively besieging Mauberge, Landrecies, Philippeville, Givet and Longwy, he did not miss writing in front of each fort letters charged with passion and Prussian patriotism."[1]

Madame Récamier was not very sensitive on the score of patriotism. The virtue hardly existed in her circle. Her friends were governed by hatreds and jealousies, which they excused by talking about the interests of France. Nobody was duped by their sophisms. Caste hatred was called political conviction. The desires, vanities, hopes that reigned over society, the greed for money that dominated the moral misery, produced a natural and legitimate aversion from the intolerable tyranny of the Emperor. The country submitted too easily. These feelings were shared by Madame de Staël, Madame Récamier, and most of their associates. Chateaubriand referred to them in his remark: "When liberty disappears there remains a country, but no longer a nation."[2] Madame Récamier had contemplated a divorce in order to marry a Prussian prince. Besides, her friendship was often extended to strangers, to men who did not love France, to men who were to become traitors. Moreau was a traitor, as were Bernadotte and Murat. The Queen of Naples, Caroline Bonaparte, was a traitress of the deepest

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 148. What would have been said in 1870 of a Frenchwoman who corresponded in this way with one of the Prussian princes commanding the army of invasion? The case was the same in 1814.

[2] *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 421.

infamy. Madame Récamier welcomed to Paris the King of Prussia, the Prince of Prussia, the Duke of Wellington. They were men of rank and distinction. Intoxicated by vanity there could be no country for the poor woman. Her friend, Madame de Staël, was half a foreigner, and her genius will never pardon the fact that she wished France to be defeated during the campaign of Marengo.[1] Madame de Staël influenced Madame Récamier, and was partially responsible for her undignified failings. Unhappily, in this drawing-room atmosphere, impregnated with caste interest rather than with patriotism, all sense of reality and duty was strangely obliterated. In fighting the tyrant who had become the plague of France and Europe, compromise and criminal alliances were easily admitted as allies. There were few moral scruples. Honour and dignity were compelled to give way to political passion. The emigrants had made such tactics legitimate. But the sad example they afforded should have rendered them proscribed for ever.

Prince Augustus saw Madame Récamier again when he entered Paris as a conqueror. He also met her at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818, when the Congress was held in that city. He passed every day with her, and at night the inhabitants were astonished by the appearance of a squadron of cavalry lighting up the road with torches. They acted as the Prince's escort of honour, and they formed up in front of Madame Récamier's house during the princely visit.

In the same year, 1818, the faithful lover commissioned Baron Gérard to paint a picture of " Corinne improvising at Cape Misène," a subject borrowed from Madame de Staël's celebrated novel.[2] Directly the canvas was finished he offered it to Madame Récamier. It was not only a present he wished to offer in exchange for the beautiful portrait by the same artist, but also a lasting souvenir of their common friend, Madame de Staël, who had died in 1817.

In his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* Chateaubriand glides rapidly

[1] " I wished Bonaparte beaten." *Dix années d'exil*, p. 21.

[2] Madame Sophie Gay, in *Salons célèbres* (pp. 102-193), gives the history of this picture.

over Prince Augustus's love for Madame Récamier. The episode could not have pleased him, for he wished the life of this woman to contain the story of but one man, and that man himself! So he allotted the Prince but ten or twelve lines, in which others have found two errors of fact.

Until the end of his life the Prince preserved the portrait of the woman who had said to him: "You are the only man who has made my heart beat." Madame Récamier probably looked upon her sanity as love. When the Prince died, a clause in his will bequeathed the portrait to the original. But the betrothal ring she had given him at Coppet did not quit his finger in death. Carrying it to his tomb he wears it for eternity.

## CHAPTER V

MADAME RECAMIER returned to Paris at the end of October, 1807. Still thinking of her prince, she continued in correspondence with him. Although recognising that she might soon find it necessary to quit her house in the Rue du Mont Blanc, and generally cut down her expenditure, she did not neglect to notify her arrival to her friends. She added to their number by receiving every person of distinction who came to Paris. At one of her small evening gatherings, Benjamin Constant read his beautiful romance, *Adolphe*. His character unhappily did not rise to the heights of his genius, and *Adolphe* is his only book that lives. Later he read it in several other *salons*, particularly at that of Queen Hortense. Afterwards it was printed. Madame Récamier did not appreciate the work. Affected in everything, and only natural by an effort, she could not possibly enjoy so powerful a masterpiece. Besides, the book is an exposure of the incurable and desolating feebleness that marks the character of Adolphe, a hero who is no other than the author himself. There was an additional reason why Madame Récamier was unable to find pleasure in the story. The character of a coquette is very well studied and depicted, and the death of Ellénore recalled her own fancy of ending her days by suicide. Other motives prevented *Adolphe* from becoming the bedside companion of this mistress of coquetry. After the reading Benjamin Constant returned home, and wrote in his notebook : " they find the character of the hero revolting. Decidedly they are not able to understand me."[1] He was thinking of Madame Récamier, and

[1] *Journal Intime de Benjamin Constant*, p. 119.

he knew that she was incapable of appreciating *Adolphe*. He did not understand Madame Récamier for the simple reason that he was astonished his book did not please her. His attention was rapidly concentrated upon the artificial nature of Madame Récamier. Love made him take up the study, and after much blindness his eyes were opened.

In the meanwhile Madame Récamier went to the masked balls at the Opera, and amused herself with an intrigue with Monsieur de Metternich.[1] At the moment the beautiful Mademoiselle Georges was living under his protection. He was also courting the Emperor's sister, the Princess Caroline, and General Junot's charming wife. Supremely a diplomatist, he did not fear a new entanglement. Madame Récamier was in the same position. During this winter, the Russian Ambassador, Count Tolstoï, threw off his usual moroseness, and openly paid her his addresses. This led the Emperor to declare that any foreigner who frequented Madame Récamier's salon would be considered as a personal enemy. Metternich and Tolstoï did not discontinue their visits. Their interest in the beautiful Juliette was as much political as amorous. It was important for them to know the subjects of discussion in the principal salon of the opposition. In order not to clash too much with the orders of the despot they called upon Madame Récamier in the morning, when she received her more intimate friends.

In the course of 1808 Madame Récamier removed from the Rue du Mont Blanc, and took up her residence in a smaller house, No. 32 Rue Basse-du-Rempart. With her were her husband and her father, with his old friend, Monsieur Simonard.[2] Her life was not particularly interesting. She

[1] Metternich (1773-1859) was successively Austrian representative at Dresden and Berlin, arriving at Paris in the same capacity in 1806, after Austerlitz. From 1809 to 1848 he remained in charge of Austrian foreign policy, and a determined enemy of all democratic or liberal aspirations. He negotiated the marriage of Marie Louise to Napoleon. The revolution of 1848 destroyed his policy, and for a while he had to seek safety in England.

[2] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 152.

often saw the Marquise de Catellan, whose fantastic and impulsive nature was the antithesis of her own. " Madame de Catellan," wrote a friend, " was almost mad in her horror of restraint. She would not seat herself twice in the same place, for fear that her drawing-room should have an air of regularity and artificiality, which, she explained, might influence her visitors."[1] Madame Récamier, however, had much sympathy with her. In the autumn of 1809 she went to Switzerland, and, at the request of Madame de Staël, played in the theatre at Coppet. The following summer the two friends found themselves together at the Château de Chaumont, near Blois. Madame de Staël was forbidden to come within forty leagues of Paris, so, from Blois, she superintended the printing of her great book on Germany.

The Emperor was annoyed at her return to France. In a book dealing with Germany he realised that the author's malignity would lose no occasion to criticise him more or less openly, and he would probably receive some vicious scratches. He desired an official and colourless literature in his Empire. Esménard's censorship admitted nothing but eulogies of the sovereign and his government, trifles, platitudes, conventionalities—a style of literature the Academy loved to crown. He would not suffer such men as Benjamin Constant, Sismondi, de Barante. They were all in sympathy with Madame de Staël, and, seeking liberty of thought and expression, formed at Coppet an opposition Academy, which gave rise to much imperial vexation. Whilst Madame de Staël was completing her book, the Emperor prepared to act in his own very unpleasant manner. Madame de Staël's life with Madame Récamier at Chaumont-sur-Loire and Fossé was far from dull. " Unable to continue in the Château de Chaumont," Madame de Staël wrote, " for the owners were returning from America, I settled down in a property called Fossé, which a generous friend[2] lent me. The house was the residence of a Vendéan soldier who did not look after it very well. But his loyal goodwill rendered

[1] Comtesse de Sainte-Aulaire, *Souvenirs*, p. 177.
[2] Monsieur de Salaberry.

everything easy, and his wit was extremely amusing. Directly we arrived, an Italian musician whom I had with me to give lessons to my daughter, commenced to play the guitar, and my daughter accompanied on the harp the sweet voice of my beautiful friend, Madame Récamier. The country folks assembled beneath our windows, astonished to listen to this colony of troubadours that had come to animate their master's solitude. At Fossé I passed my last days in France, in the company of friends whose remembrance lives in my heart. After dinner we arranged to sit round a green table, and, instead of talking, write. This amused us so much that we were eager to leave the dining-table. Sometimes chance strangers entered. We were impatient at their interruption of our habits. Our *petite poste* [1]—for that is what we called it—went on as before. The inhabitants of the neighbouring village were astonished at our novel ways, which they thought pedantic, but the game was our only resource against the monotony of solitude. One day a country gentleman, interested in nothing but hunting, came to take my son through his woods. He sat for some time at our industrious and silent table. Madame Récamier wrote with her pretty hand a little letter to this great hunter, for he was not altogether a stranger to the circle in which he found himself. He excused himself from taking it, assuring us that he could not read the writing on account of the light. We laughed a little at the lack of success of our beautiful friend's amiable coquetry, and we thought that a letter from her hand would not always have the same fate."[2]

Madame de Staël printed her *Sur les Allemands*, three volumes, in an edition of ten thousand copies. Directly they were stacked up in the shop the Emperor seized and destroyed them. This odious action was a startling blow at the little circle. Madame de Staël protested, with all the reserve necessitated by the tyranny under which she lived, but in a

[1] This game was also played at Coppet. See Madame de Genlis, *Mémoires*, Vol. VI., p. 128.

[2] Madame de Staël. *Dix années d'exil.* Second part, chapter I.

tone of proud dignity.[1] Receiving a sarcastic reply from the Duc de Rovigo, she decided to go back to Coppet.

In August of the following year (1811) Mathieu de Montmorency visited her. When the news of his arrival reached Paris he received an order forbidding him to come within forty leagues of the capital. Madame de Staël, always ready to be carried away by her temperament, refers to the exile with much exaggeration. "I cried with grief at the misfortune," she wrote, "I had drawn down upon the head of my generous friend. My heart, although tried enough during the past years, was never in a greater despair. I knew not how to deaden the heartrending thoughts that coursed through my mind. I was compelled to take opium to pass through these hours of anguish. . . ." This is splendid verbiage. A woman like Madame de Staël should have had more self-control, firmness and mastery of herself. There was no need to scatter such vain words. Above all, the order of exile, though odious as an attack upon liberty, was little more than a simple vexation. Mathieu was a millionaire, and not compelled to live in Paris. The quotation from Madame de Staël must be continued: "Whilst I was in this state there came a letter from Madame Récamier, that beautiful woman who has received the homage of the whole of Europe, and who has never abandoned an unhappy friend."

"She told me that in journeying to the waters of Aix, in Savoy, she intended calling upon me, and that she would arrive in two days. I trembled lest the fate of Monsieur de Montmorency should befall her. However unlikely it may seem, I feared this barbarous and precise hatred, so I sent a messenger to Madame Récamier begging her not to come to Coppet. She had constantly consoled me with the most amiable affection, but she must not come within leagues of me. She was passing near my home, but she could not be permitted to see me. Perhaps it was for the last time!

[1] Lord Glenbervie wrote in his *Journals*: "Madame de Staël has sold her copy of her book, *Sur les Allemands* (which was suppressed in France and two thousand copies burnt) to Murray for £1,500."

I implored her not to stop at Coppet. She refused to give way. She was not able to pass under my windows without stopping some hours with me. In a convulsion of tears I saw her enter a house where her arrival had always been a fête. She left the next day, and went at once to a relation some fifty leagues from Switzerland. All was in vain. Fatal exile struck her. She had the intention to see me. That was enough. A generous pity had inspired her. She must be punished. The reverse of fortune through which she had passed rendered her very sensible of the destruction of her proper home. Separated from all her friends, she passed entire months in a tiny provincial town, a victim to the most monotonous and saddest solitude. This punishment I had inflicted upon the most brilliant woman of her age. The French are famous for their gallantry, but their official head had not shown the slightest regard for the prettiest woman of Paris. On the same day he struck birth and virtue in the person of Monsieur de Montmorency, beauty in Madame Récamier, and, if I dare to say so, in me some reputation for talent."[1]

Madame Récamier was thus, like Madame de Staël and Mathieu de Montmorency, forbidden to see Paris again. Her husband wrote to her, saying that he had been ordered to attend at the police prefecture, where the decree had been read to him. Faithful to his habits of extreme caution, he added: "It is useless to dwell upon gratuitous and superfluous regrets under these circumstances. The only question is how to soften your position. Above all it must not be aggravated by fresh imprudences, which are likely to have the most serious consequences for me. I have every need of goodwill, and require favourable influences, and not contrary dispositions. They are necessary to further the progress and careers of each of the different members of our family. Ruin will befall us if the Emperor takes an aversion and disgust to me and to your father . . ."[2] Monsieur Récamier was not combative by nature, and,

[1] Madame de Staël. *Dix années d'exil*, p. 179-180.
[2] *Madame Récamier et les amis de sa jeunesse*, p. 77.

after eighteen years' interval, we find the man who stood amongst the crowd watching the guillotine calling for the "favourable prepossessions" of Napoleon.

In the hope of arranging matters, Madame Récamier returned with precipitation to Paris. Her presence was immediately made known to the Prefect of Police, Monsieur Pasquier, who took measures to execute the Emperor's order. On the day following her arrival in Paris, Madame Récamier left, taking the road to Châlons.

In his memoirs the Duc de Rovigo treats Madame Récamier's exclusion from Paris as a measure of the slightest importance, and indeed laughs about it. Madame Lenormant, in her books on her aunt, exaggerates its sorrows and unhappiness. Madame de Staël, always "high-falutin'," declares that she quite lost her head over the business. On one side and the other there is nothing but exaggeration.

The arbitrary measure which struck her down merits our condemnation. But it must be recognised that in the town of Châlons, which she selected for her residence, there was no lack of the distraction she was unable to live without. She received there the condolences—felicitations could almost be written—of nearly all her friends, and, according to Monsieur de Montlosier's phrase, she belonged to those who could say "five hundred of my friends." For some time she had the very pleasant occupation of receiving these compliments and answering them.

In selecting Châlons-sur-Marne, Madame Récamier had been attracted by the neighbourhood of Montmirail. Here the La Rochefoucauld-Doudeauville had a magnificent château, which was visited each successive summer by the Montmorencys. Upon reaching the town she descended like an ordinary traveller at a little inn called the "Pomme d'Or." A tiny apartment was soon found for her in the Rue du Cloître. Her friend the Marquise de Catellan, in spite of her enormous size,[1] did not hesitate to visit her, bringing into the calm silence of the provincial lodging a sprightly gaiety. They made an arrangement by which

[1] Duchesse d'Abrantès. *Mémoires*, Vol. II., p. 32.

the Marquise received all Madame Récamier's letters in Paris, and safely forwarded them to Châlons. From this moment Madame Récamier lived in correspondence with her friends. For, as Chateaubriand has written, " a thousand incidents of Bonaparte's oppression were lost in the general tyranny. The persecuted did not try to see their friends in dread lest they might compromise them. Friends dared not pay visits for fear of attracting an increased punishment. The unhappy *proscrit* became as if stricken with the plague, and was sequestrated from his fellow-beings. The hatred of the despot compelled him to live in quarantine. Directly a man was known for his independence of opinion his friends were compelled to retire, and there only remained spies upon his liaisons, his sentiments, his correspondence, and his conduct. Such were the days of happiness and liberty." [1] Chateaubriand omits to mention the devastating wars undertaken at the sole pleasure of the Emperor.

At Châlons Madame Récamier witnessed the continual passage of the troops marching towards Germany to be engulphed in mysterious Russia. An air of sadness, like a presentiment of mourning, already weighed upon the silent and deserted town. As a distraction, and for the sake of occupation, the young woman kept with her the daughter of Monsieur Récamier's sister, the little Amélie Cyvoct, aged five to six years, who became later Madame Lenormant. She also received a few visits from the owner of the Château de Montmirail, Monsieur Sosthène de La Rochefoucauld, a relation to Mathieu de Montmorency. The last-named, fearing to compromise himself, received from his friend the prefet every three months an authorisation to call upon Madame Récamier. Monsieur Bernard, Monsieur Récamier,

[1] *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 421. To-day, when men are heard to praise the benefit of monarchical government, and to recall " the good time " of the Empire, it is well to re-read these lines. Already, in 1821, a woman of intelligence, the Duchesse de Broglie (Albertine de Staël), wrote to Monsieur de Barante : " I am tired of the present factitious praise of Bonaparte. It would be rather absurd, if, after having tormented the human race all his life, he should die of universal praise." Are we not like 1821 at the present ?

and his friend Simonard, also came. Auguste de Staël, a very devoted admirer, called twice.

Madame Récamier wished to join her friend at Coppet, but Madame de Staël always replied by asking her to postpone the journey for fear of fresh persecution. She advised her, however, to leave Châlons, "where everything is noticed because there is nobody," and to go to Lyons. But from Coppet she turned her aside with an obstinate energy her beautiful friend could not understand. Madame Récamier was wounded, but she did not know the guest Madame de Staël was entertaining at that moment at Coppet. Under her roof was a young officer of hussars, Monsieur de Rocca, whom she loved. Corinne did not wish any third person to disturb an intimacy of which she was jealous. There was reason in her methods, for Rocca was twenty-one years younger than Madame de Staël. The presence of "the beauty of the beauties" with her attractive smiles and perpetual coquetry might have involuntarily led to a disaster.

The better to guard her hussar Madame de Staël later sanctioned her liaison by marriage, but for a long while and without obvious reason, this marriage was kept secret.

Madame Récamier did not know anything about the affair. At last she wrote to Madame de Staël stating that she would soon arrive at Coppet. She received letter after letter begging her not to come. Slightly mystified, she took the road without delay, less perhaps for the pleasure of seeing her friend than for that of fathoming the secret. She had a letter at Dijon which added to the obscurity. "I bid you adieu, dear angel of my life, with all the tenderness of my soul. I recommend Auguste to you. When he sees you he will think of me. You are a celestial creature. Had I lived with you, I should have been too happy. Fate drags me away. Adieu." [1]

To preserve her affection for Rocca as well as her reputation, Madame de Staël had left Coppet.[2] There was a very

[1] Chateaubriand. *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 422.
[2] May 23, 1812. See *Dix années d'exil*, p. 198.

real reason for her departure, and it was absolutely necessary that she should travel to a place where she was unknown. At Geneva the news would have provoked a scandal.[1] She did not act logically. Her friend, Zacharias Werner, preached the religion of holy love, to which she had been converted before she knew the apostle or his doctrine. As his disciple she should have dared the consequence of her actions, and set herself above vulgar prejudices. Madame Récamier understood less and less the perplexing situation, but continued her journey as far as Lyons.

She decided to remain in that city. More than one reason influenced her. She was not far from Coppet. Then, at Lyons, in the same hotel, were living the Duchesse de Chevreuse, also exiled from Paris, the Duchesse de Luynes, her mother-in-law, and mother-in-law also to Mathieu de Montmorency, and Camille Jordan. In the town were the numerous kin of Monsieur Bernard and Monsieur Récamier. They welcomed a relation whose distinguished friends were of so high a rank as to bring upon her the honour of imperial disgrace.

During this residence in Lyons, Camille Jordan took her and the Duchesse de Luynes over the printing-house of the older Ballanche and his son. And the younger partner was presented to her.

Monsieur Ballanche[2] was a man quite alone in the scheme of creation. It has been observed of Pellisson that he abused the liberty given to men, and above all to men of intellect, to be ugly. Ballanche abused it even more than

[1] A confidential letter from Baron Capelle, prefet of Leman, to the Duc de Rovigo, minister of police, dated February 19, 1813, speaks of her flight with Rocca, and a rumour of her secret marriage. According to the Metternich memoirs when she was in Vienna with her lover she asked the director of police to present her in the salons. He refused. She insisted. "But, madame, why should we make war for love of Monsieur Rocca?" She replied: "Why not? He is my friend, and will be my husband." Metternich. *Mémoires*, Vol. III., p. 477.

[2] Not "de Ballanche" as Gustave Claudin writes in *Quarante ans de Souvenirs, ou les boulevards de* 1830 *à* 1871. Claudin had certainly not read his *Palingénésie*. Madame de Genlis writes "de Ballange," which is also incorrect.

Madame Récamier made use of the permission given her to be beautiful. He was uglier than Socrates, his predecessor in philosophy, and did not possess, like Mirabeau, a "resplendent ugliness." He was naïve to simplicity. Modest in all his tastes, he lived contentedly. It was true that he had suffered a succession of misfortunes capable of satisfying the most exacting. Some old scars, the result of an accident, marked his face. In addition were several warts, which did not tend towards embellishment. Thus his ugliness bore a stamp of burlesque, which almost made him the subject of ridicule. Though intelligent, he was as timid as a child.

Chance threw him suddenly into the midst of a circle of fashionable and mocking young women. So clumsy that he blinded people with his hat when saluting them, his clothes more than neglected, possessed of a most comical body, his outward appearance was uncouth. His soul, however, was of quite a different order, most beautiful, and more fit for heaven than earth. Soubert, the friend of Fontanes, Chateaubriand, and Madame de Beaumont, had "a soul which meeting a body by chance, had got away from it as best it could." The same remark applies to his contemporary Ballanche, who shared with Joubert the friendship of Chateaubriand. It was impossible to find a purer, more devoted, or more generous character. Frank and candid, refusing to believe in the existence of evil, even ignorant, convinced of the goodwill of everybody, he never estimated himself at his true worth. A baby with a grey beard, he could not understand that he was rather an exception in the world, a kind of Abbé Constantin.

He would not have been perfect if he had not owned a defect in his speech. Perhaps he imagined he could cure it by following the remedy of Demosthenes, for he always seemed to have his mouth full of pebbles when he tried to speak. When any person addressed him, it seemed as if he had to swallow one or two stones before replying.

To all these qualities he added two more. He was a philosopher and a poet. He believed that his mission on earth was to revive the feeling for philosophic poetry.

Naturally, with such ideas, he was the most absent-minded man to be encountered, and might have given points in this respect to his great compatriot and friend Ampère. Because he was more fit to inhabit the heavens than the earth he was generally in the clouds, or star-gazing.[1] The " Grand Arnauld " possessed the same character, and Nicole was not unlike in his actions.

Madame Récamier neglected no conquest. Her habit was to parade her sweetest manner in front of every man to whom she spoke. She did not forget to direct her battery of coquetry upon the philosopher. The honest man had never seen a woman act in this manner. He thought Mahomet's paradise was opening. He took everything at its face value, and thoroughly believed he had made a conquest of " the beauty of the beauties."

The day after his introduction, when he visited her, Madame Récamier was alone. This put him at his ease, and he lost his timidity. The young woman had the charity not to accentuate her importance. In spite of his defect of pronunciation, he became even eloquent. He embarked in a weighty dissertation on philosophy and morality. He did not notice that Madame Récamier, with a tiny grimace and a wandering eye, was visibly ill at ease. She ended by revealing the reason of her discomfort. The philosopher was wearing new shoes, and the smell of the leather troubled her. At last, she declared that she was not used to such an acrid perfume, which would make her faint.

Monsieur Ballanche apologised humbly, saying that he would repair his mistake. Very gravely he got up and went out. Then he returned in his socks. He had taken off his shoes, and left them behind the door. Madame Récamier could not help smiling. Monsieur de Narbonne, Monsieur de Lamoignon, and Monsieur de Montrond could

[1] Monsieur de Barante said of him : " He is a man who has always lived in the clouds, but sometimes the clouds open." A letter from J. Mohl to J. J. Ampère relates : " I have seen Ballanche. He was even more somnambulistic than usual, but in a state of great bliss."

never have done such a deed. The philosopher, who believed himself as fashionable as any of these gentlemen, took up the thread of his philosophy. The " beauty of the beauties," returned to her own thoughts. Visitors entered. They studied with curiosity Ballanche's socks.

" Did you come like that ? " asked an indiscreet person.

" Oh, no ! I had on some new shoes. It seems that they smelt of leather. Madame Récamier does not care for smells. So I took them off, and left them in the hall. I shall put them on again when I go out." [1]

His philosophy never found such a success as had this explanation. Madame Récamier was conquered. This great philosophic child was a good recruit to exhibit in her menagerie. After the fashion of Madame de Tencin, she liked to call her familiars " my beasts."

Monsieur Ballanche fell deeply in love with Madame Récamier. It was more than a pure, respectful, and patient bondage. Rather a state of adoration, a folly but a very sweet folly, a semi-religious ecstasy. It was the first flight of a pure soul, seized with a vertigo before the immensity of the sentiment that had suddenly taken possession of his being. All the philosopher dared to demand from Madame Récamier was leave to enjoy the feelings of a brother for a sister. When he obtained this favour he wept with happiness. Then he became troubled, and thought himself the most unhappy of men. He believed himself to be in the way, and tolerated by her simply through goodness of soul. " The idea often occurs to me," he wrote, " I imagine that you pretend an attachment for me which actually does not exist. This thought is a torment added to all my other torments. Through pity, and in condescension, you show an interest in me." [2] Madame Récamier reassured him, and again he became the happiest of men.

It may be asked if it were truly for the love of philosophy that Madame Récamier, a thorough wheedler, received

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 201.
[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. I., p. 294.

Monsieur Ballanche. He was quite unknown. His outward appearance did not harmonise with those of Montmorency and the other familiars of her salon, and could not have flattered the little vanities of the mistress of the house. He was not irresistibly seductive, so her action was not prompted by love. She was very cold, and her nature incapable of the slightest infatuation. Madame Récamier had a well reasoned motive for admitting this humble person into her flock. She mixed only with princes and dukes, with ambassadors, and the illustrious of every variety. She feared an accusation that she despised the middle-classes, who formed her real world. The presence of Ballanche in her house would not wrong anybody. She would be able to boast of her generous tolerance, and thus save the situation by wearing the aureole of a protectress of letters. The philosopher-poet's blunders of etiquette created a little amusement. He did not alter, possibly was not aware of his mistakes. In 1824, when he accompanied Madame Récamier to Rome, he met in her rooms the most exalted "quality" of the cosmopolitan society of the Eternal City. He would have been surprised had he read this reflection in one of Mathieu's letters to Juliette: "Permit me to smile a trifle over the good Ballanche, thrown into the grandest society." [1]

In the meanwhile Madame Récamier received the visits of her friends. Amongst them were the Duchesses de Luynes and de Chevreuse, Camille Jordan, Ballanche, Mathieu de Montmorency and Auguste de Staël. The latter was a handsome young man bearing a striking resemblance to the Comte Louis de Narbonne. The likeness was not surprising when it was recollected that Madame de Staël had had a liaison with Monsieur de Narbonne whilst he was minister of war to Louis XVI. When the Comte inspected the northern frontiers she had accompanied him.

Madame de Staël asked Madame de Récamier to look after her son during her absence. "I recommend Auguste to you," she wrote in her letter of farewell. "He must see

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. II., p. 61.

you. . . . I count upon you to soften his existence now." The young man paid frequent visits, so often renewed that they attracted the attention of the police. In a letter of the February 19, 1813, addressed by the Baron Cappelle, prefet of Leman, to the Duc de Rovigo, minister of police, is the following note : " I have not ceased to keep her son Auguste under surveillance, and I am very well acquainted with what he does and what he says. Madame Récamier, who is in this town (Lyons), is not only the most intimate friend of Madame de Staël, but also the mistress of her son, Auguste. He often goes there in secret."

The assertion is as difficult to prove as to refute, and must be reproduced without comment. But the reports of the police officers should not be accepted without the greatest reserve. They could only guess at what passed in Madame Récamier's rooms during the visits of Auguste de Staël. Such conjectures of subordinate officials are seldom impartial. They have too keen a desire to please their superiors, and they can be accused of an excess of zeal rather than an excess of delicacy.

Madame Récamier now had a desire to visit Rome. Had she been so strongly interested in Auguste de Staël she would probably have remained with him at Lyons, or he would have accompanied her to Italy. Before leaving, she took the advice of her friends. Mathieu de Montmorency strongly counselled her to make the journey. He secretly believed that she would devote herself to religion and piety. Madame de Boigne, with her wit and good sense, found the scheme " quite unreasonable," and she explained why. " You must not deceive yourself. The true need of your life is society and conversation. In Italy they do not exist, particularly at the present, for visitors, who bring most of the animation, are very rare. You love the arts because they distract you, and because you have a good taste which you seek to exercise. But I put the question to you. Are the arts, and even a beautiful country, sufficient to interest your heart and your imagination ? Without a doubt, no. Very

well, you will find nothing else in Italy, and you will become very tired of wandering from town to town, without an aim and without a plan." [1]

To prove Madame de Boigne wrong, who believed her lacking in taste, and easily wearied if she had not a travelling salon of friends, she decided to start for Italy without delay. Camille Jordan joined Monsieur de Montmorency in advising her to go.

She left at the beginning of the spring of 1813, taking with her the little Amélie Cyvoct, her husband's niece, and a maid. Monsieur de Montmorency accompanied her as far as Chambéry. Upon leaving Turin, Monsieur Pasquier, brother to the prefect of the police, insisted that she should add to her company a young German for the sake of protection. The Italian highways were insecure and the presence of a man was an advantage.

At Rome, Madame Récamier received the Frenchmen she found in residence. Monsieur de Forbin had been exiled by the Emperor after having been amongst the lovers of his pretty sister, the Princess Pauline. Monsieur de Norvins was then the prefect of police at Rome. He was later one of the historians of Napoleon, and has left some valuable and witty memoirs. Madame Récamier referred to him in a letter sent to Camille Jordan. " This Monsieur de Norvins is certainly a man of wit. He has lent to me some writings which prove his talent. There is a mixture in him of the old and new *régimes*, which always astonishes me. Sometimes he recalls Monsieur de Narbonne, and the instant after Regnault de Saint Jean d'Angely. He is very pleasant and amiable." [2] Madame Récamier took part in the Holy Week ceremonies, but the absence of the Pope, who was Napoleon's prisoner at Fontainebleau, robbed them of their accustomed splendour. She did not forget to visit Canova's studio, and naturally made a conquest of the great sculptor. Still further to give the lie to Madame de Boigne, who refused to believe in her love for the fine arts, she returned often to

[1] *Madame Récamier et les amis de sa jeunesse*, p. 122.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 243. Letter already published by Sainte-Beuve.

his atelier, probably telling her malicious friend that she had a passion for sculpture.

Monsieur Ballanche, who had a passion for Madame Récamier, was not able to console himself during her absence. He wished to go to Rome to tell her so. Camille Jordan did his utmost to turn the philosopher from such a project. But Ballanche did not listen to him. At last Camille Jordan revealed his friend's intentions to "the beauty of the beauties." She replied: "Why do you oppose the departure of Monsieur de Ballanche? This is really not a matter to quarrel over. Understand that, after you, Monsieur Ballanche is the person I would best like to travel with."

Ballanche picked up his hat and umbrella and fled south like a swallow. He did not stop day or night. Losing his hat at Alexandria, and his umbrella I know not where, he disembarked hot, dusty, and hatless, at the Palazzo Fiano on the Corso, where Madame Récamier had hired an apartment. The days he passed in Rome with her and Canova were an enchantment, of which there is more than a trace in his poem *Antigone*. Some fragments were read to Madame Récamier, and her soft smile can be discovered in the portrait he drew of the daughter of Œdipus. Unhappily the enchantment was short. Recalled to his father, who was ill, Ballanche had to return to Lyons, whilst Madame Récamier accepted the hospitality that Canova offered her and the little girl at Albano during the dog days.

Madame Récamier was charitable, perhaps owing to a good heart, perhaps merely through fashion. Once at Lyons Madame Récamier rescued from a band of mountebanks an unhappy little English girl. She fed and lodged her, and then apprenticed the child to a trade.[1] Another time she visited secretly some Spanish prisoners who were held captive in the same city, and tried to console them.[2] During

[1] *Madame Récamier et les amis de sa jeunesse*, p. 146. Madame de Genlis. *Memoires*, Vol. VIII., p. 143-144.

[2] Chateaubriand. *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 425.

the brilliant years of her youth under the Consulate, when driving through a village on the outskirts of Paris she came across a deaf-mute. This girl she looked after, and sent to be educated at the Abbé Sicard's institution.[1] At Albano, an unhappy fisherman was accused of being in treasonable correspondence with the English. He was condemned to death, and her intervention was solicited. She immediately returned to Rome, and sought Monsieur de Norvins. But he, although a clever man, refused to grant her request. In "harsh and almost menacing phrases," he told Madame Récamier that it was not the business of an exile to interfere with the course of imperial justice. The fisherman was executed a few hours before the return of Madame Récamier to Albano. About the same time, almost to a day, Marshals Ney and Oudinot openly revolted against Napoleon. They confronted him menacingly, and refused to obey his orders. They were not punished, but the poor fisherman of Albano, too ignorant to be capable of treason, suffered the penalty of death.

To save the life of the Albano fisherman, Madame Récamier had done everything humanly possible. Without losing a moment, she travelled to Rome, passing through a country infested with malaria and thieves. Her pleading before General Miollis, the governor of Rome, and Monsieur de Norvins, the prefect of police, must have been painful. She was an exile, and they were the officials of the sovereign who had banished her. This action in itself does her great honour.[2]

Chateaubriand has commemorated this doleful episode in some powerful lines. "To be disgusted with conquerors, one must learn all the evil they have caused. We must see the indifference with which they sacrifice the most inoffensive creatures in a corner of the globe they have never even visited. What did the life of a poor drier of nets in the Roman States matter to the success of Bonaparte? Without

[1] Kotzebue. *Souvenirs de Paris en* 1804, chap. IV.

[2] This episode of the fisherman of Albano is related in *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 236-239, and in *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 428-429.

a doubt he never knew that the wretched fisherman even existed. In the warfare of his battle with kings he ignored the name of his plebeian victim.

" The world perceived in Napoleon only the victor. The tears which cement his triumphal columns never fell from its eyes. Yet I believe that these despised sufferings of the humble and the poor formed in the councils of Providence the secret causes which precipitated the downfall of his dominion. When injustices so accumulate the scale drops. There are bloodstains which remain silent, and bloodstains which cry aloud. The blood running on the fields of battle is sucked up by the earth in silence. But blood that is spilt in peace cries to heaven. God receives and avenges it. Bonaparte killed the fisherman of Albano. A few months after, he was banished to the fisher-isle of Elba. He died amidst the fishermen of Saint Helena."

In December, 1813, Madame Récamier determined to visit Naples. The Prince de Rohan-Chabot, the future cardinal, who had not yet taken orders, wrote from Naples, saying that the King and Queen had not forgotten her, and would be happy to see her in their capital. This invitation was given with all the usual diplomatic forms, and Madame Récamier started. As the roads were hardly safe, she accepted the company of an Englishman. Each travelled in a carriage with the servants. They went post, and at each relay station found the exchange horses ready. Thus they did not lose a minute. This gave Madame Récamier a high opinion of the manner in which Murat had organised the posts of his kingdom. Upon her arrival at Terracine, she finished her toilette, and was waiting at her window for the dinner to be announced, when two carriages stopped noisily in front of the house, and a traveller descended, swearing loudly. He entered the *auberge*, and Madame Récamier heard him on the staircase still swearing.

" Where are these insolent scoundrels who have taken my horses ? Where are they, so that I may teach them manners ? "

Madame Récamier thought she recognised the figure she

CAROLINE BONAPARTE, QUEEN OF NAPLES

saw from the window. The voice did not leave her in doubt. She opened her door.

" I am the culprit, monsieur le duc," she replied. " And here I am ! "

The angry man was Fouché, Duc d'Otrante. He was in charge of a mission from the Emperor to Murat, whose loyalty became day by day as unstable as the imperial throne. Madame Récamier had received the benefit of the arrangements Fouché's courier had made for his master. This was the reason of the minister's anger. The conversation was a little lively at first, but she soon softened him, and they parted good friends. Madame Récamier's beautiful eyes had some share in producing this result, but the imminent fall of Napoleon was also a factor.

The Queen of Naples was perhaps a cleverer politician than a grateful sister. She, too, probably foresaw the approaching disaster, and, perhaps for this reason alone, sent to the Hôtel de l'Europe, on the quai de Chiaja, a magnificent gift of flowers and fruit. There was common-sense underlying the friendship which gave so gracious a welcome, and she was guided by the custom of the country. It is the amiable habit of the Italians to welcome their visitors with flowers and fruit.

The next day Madame Récamier went to the palace to thank the King and Queen for their gifts. She was the object of every imaginable attention. The two sovereigns received her as a friend, almost as an equal. It was evident that they wished to please. They commanded her to remain to lunch, they put the royal box in every theatre at her disposal, she was invited to ascend Vesuvius—which she did in the company of some of the English aristocracy, and was shown an excavation at Pompeii. In order to give more importance to the fête improvised in her honour, the King and Queen invited all the ambassadors, the Prince de Rohan, and some distinguished foreigners. They lunched amidst the ruins, and were conducted by Mazois, a learned architect. Some relics found in the ruins were offered to their beautiful guest.

Madame Récamier soon perceived that although the royal couple were perfectly agreed as to the manner in which to receive her, they were not so well agreed upon the question of politics. She quickly understood that she had arrived in the midst of a conjugal crisis. Murat was engaged in a terrible fight between his duty—which he did not wish to neglect—and his interest, which the imperious will of his wife forced him to follow. The Queen, in fact, thought more of her crown than of the brother who had given it to her, even more than of France and honour. She pressed Murat to desert the Emperor. She foresaw that the coalition would be too powerful, and preferred to be on the stronger side, and to assist it in smashing her brother. The price of her treason and ignominy was the preservation of her crown.

Madame Récamier arrived almost as a mediatrix in the royal household, which was divided by the most poignant passions—except that of duty. The Queen told her of Murat's indecision, of the exigencies of politics, of the sacrifices necessary for the good of the people, but she did not tell her that Murat had just signed (January 11, 1814) a treaty with the Court of Vienna, by which he engaged not only to leave Napoleon but to furnish an army of 30,000 men against him. For this treason the crown of Naples was guaranteed, and he was permitted to conquer the Pontifical Marches in order to enlarge his kingdom. Caroline was content.

No sooner had the Queen explained these affairs to Madame Récamier, than Murat appeared. He was pale and uneasy. His hair, usually well-cared for, was in disorder. His round eyes started from his head. He looked as if he were suffering from a frightful nightmare. The Queen turned pale at seeing him. She soon recovered, and, ashamed that her husband could not master his emotion before a stranger, spoke to him haughtily. Madame Récamier felt in the way, and rose to retire. The Queen implored her and Murat to stay.

"For your own honour and glory remain here," she cried to her husband. "Do not show yourself in such a state! A King who does not know how to be a King!"

She shrugged her shoulders, and laughed cruelly. Then she got up, saying that she had orders to give, and would return immediately.

Hardly had she disappeared when Murat seized Madame Récamier's hands, and said, with emotion:

"Tell me the truth! You think badly of me? Don't you?"

His hands trembled, his eyes were wild.

"Calm yourself," replied Madame Récamier. "Why be in such trouble? What has happened?"

"They are calling me Murat the traitor, Murat the deserter!" murmured the unhappy man hiding his face in his hands. He sank back into an armchair, and began to weep.

Madame Récamier thought that he was still undecided, and had signed nothing and promised nothing. She asked him if he wanted her good counsel.

"Yes!" he replied. "Drag me from the depths into which I have fallen."

"Well," answered Juliette. "Listen to me. You know that I do not love the Emperor. He has exiled me. He persecutes my friends. There is no liberty with him. All the same, don't abandon the Emperor. You are French, and you must remain French in order to stand together for the defence of our country."

Murat listened to her with pale face and downcast eyes. He was silent. Suddenly he jumped up, caught Madame Récamier's hand, and pulled her to a window, which he violently pushed open. He showed her the Bay of Naples. Some vessels were entering under full sail.

"Look," he cried. "There is an English fleet. And now . . . now I am in reality a traitor. What can I do? What can I do? It is too late!"

Struck with astonishment, Madame Récamier could not say a word. Murat returned to his seat, as if he had not the courage to support his betrayal. Caroline re-entered, and seeing her husband still upset, addressed him in a manner so energetic as to amaze the soft-spoken Madame Récamier.[1]

[1] D'Abrantès. *Mémoires*, Vol. X., chapter V. Chateaubriand.

She returned to her hotel, tired by the stormy scene she had witnessed; and reflected upon the happiness of those who wear a crown.

As to Murat, as forgetful of this scene as he was of duty and patriotism, he rode through the streets of Naples receiving the acclamations of his people, whilst the Queen received the caresses of her lover. Passing before Madame Récamier's hotel, he saw his visitor at her balcony, and saluted her with extreme grace. She responded in a like manner. She also forgot that he was a traitor in remembering that he was a king. It is true that she had given him in his own palace a lesson in patriotism. She might have emphasised it by refusing to return his salute.

Madame Récamier continued to visit the Queen. It would have been better if she had not. Her dignity suffered when she put her foot in the house of the sister of the despot who had exiled not only her, but Madame de Staël and Mathieu, of him who was the curse of France, and whose conduct—private as well as public—she regarded as detestable. But a queen is a queen, and, in the cowardly eyes of the world, can do no wrong.

Madame Récamier preferred to visit the palace in the morning. She found the Queen generally idling in bed, where, as regent, she amused herself at governing. One morning, as the two women were talking, a servant brought an enormous packet of letters and newspapers, with tidings that the allied armies had entered Paris. Not a cloud passed over the Queen's face—Paris? It did not concern her. She was Queen of Naples. To preserve that crown her husband was fighting the French. She opened her letters, posing vainly before her guest, who gazed at her and listened. She opened a pamphlet.

"Ah! Here is a work by Monsieur de Chateaubriand. *De Buonaparte et des Bourbons.* We will read it together."

She continued quite happily to tear open letters and papers, thinking no more of the fall of Paris and Napoleon.

*Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 438-431. *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 245-250.

" Madame Récamier picked up the pamphlet," writes Chateaubriand, " glanced at it, and then replaced it on the bed, saying to the Queen : ' Madame, I will read it when I am alone. I must now retire.' " This time she was unable to support such indifference towards the sufferings of her country and those of a brother to whom the Queen owed everything ; yet Madame Récamier was gifted with a large share of tolerance, above all when she was in the company of crowned heads.

On another morning she found the Queen in bed, receiving her minister of justice, who had brought numerous papers for signature. Caroline was delighted to display the functions of her regency. Before adding her signature to papers, she insisted on asking for explanations, and discussed the decrees. She was even more pleased when the minister asked her to confirm a death-sentence. She looked at the warrant, and smiled at her beautiful friend, overjoyed at the fact that the powers of life and death were in her hands.

" You would be very unhappy in my place," cried she, " for I am going to sign a sentence to death."

Madame Récamier sprang up. " Ah, madame ! Don't sign it," cried she. " Think that Providence has brought me here this morning in order to save this unhappy one."

Her vanity satisfied, the Queen was easy to move. She wished to display the virtue of clemency. For the sake of form she went over the case with the minister, and then accorded the favour.

But what can be thought of a government, where the lives of the citizens depended upon the caprice and humour of such a woman ? Madame Récamier thus took revenge for her defeat at Albano, and these two actions stand out beautifully in the sight of posterity by the side of the grimaces by which she hooked princes, dukes, and other great noblemen.

She returned to Rome for Holy Week. Canova was as eager and enthusiastic about her as when they first met. With an amiable insistence he invited her to visit his studio.

There was a little air of mystery about the matter. He said that he wanted her advice about some new work he had been engaged upon during her visit to Naples. There was a twinkle in the sculptor's eyes. She guessed he had some surprise in store for her, and for that reason alone wished her to come. When she entered the studio, Canova pulled a cord, a curtain fell, and Madame Récamier saw two busts of herself. In one she was shown uncovered; in the other she wore a slight veil.

"See how I have been thinking of you!" cried the artist, overflowing with happiness.

But his joy collapsed as speedily as a pierced balloon. Madame Récamier said nothing, but her face proved that she was not pleased. Why? She could hardly have been able to explain. Perhaps she did not find herself beautiful enough in these clay busts. Perhaps she believed that they should have been executed in marble or bronze. In any case, for a moment the polished manners of the woman of the world deserted her. She forgot to thank the great sculptor with the smallest word of acknowledgment for his charming attention. Decidedly she was not able to appreciate his talent. Canova was mortified. His "surprise" had given no pleasure. He received no thanks for either his gracious idea or his skilful work.

Madame Récamier was not so accomplished a woman of the world as people said, or as she thought. In her conversation, her behaviour, and her actions she lacked the necessary finish. With her, everything was reduced to a convention, and the formula did not always fit into its place when required. The method was detestable, and often played her false. But there was always some excuse for pardon. She was loved, and so she was forgiven.

At last she recognised her faults, and tried to correct them. The evil was done, and it was too late. With regard to Canova, his self-esteem had been touched to the quick, and his heart wounded. The poor man, poet as well as artist, believed that in Madame Récamier he had found the divine ideal of womanhood. He had re-created her features, and

the remembrance of her inspired his work. He had extracted the ideal from the real Madame Récamier, and for two months he had lived in daily communion with this ideal. Unhappily the ideal was in his imagination. When she re-appeared he discovered that she was but an ordinary woman. The disillusion was great. There is no crueller torture than to find that the being we love has no heart.

Before leaving Rome, Madame Récamier assisted at the solemn re-entry of the Pope into his capital, and also at the "Te Deum" he celebrated in St. Peter's. She had also the grace to visit General Miollis, who, although no longer governor of Rome, continued to reside in the city. She had to congratulate herself on his behaviour to her, and, faithful to her system of making friends everywhere—a rule she had only broken with one friend, and he Canova—she wished to thank him.

## CHAPTER VI

WITH great joy Madame Récamier took the road leading to the "Kingdom of France." She was about to join her friends, who, far from being persecuted or under suspicion, were now all-powerful. She also would be in the same happy state. Her happiness would have been overflowing, if her prim nature had not suppressed all outward demonstrations as she travelled to Lyons. In that town she rested for several days, seeing Ballanche, Camille Jordan, and Alexis de Noailles. With them she discussed a thousand schemes, listened to all their ideas, and at night dreamed that the Tuileries had given her the rank of a duchess. Madame de Staël wrote her the following letter:

Paris, May 20, 1814.

"I am ashamed to be in Paris without you, dear angel of my life. What are your plans? Would you like me to go before you to Coppet, where I shall remain four months? After so much suffering, my most inviting perspective ends in you, and my heart is devoted to you. A word about your departure, and your arrival. I await this word to know what I am to do. I would write to Rome, to Naples. . . ." [1]

Madame Récamier answered that her only plan was to regain Paris and meet her friends. She arrived on June 1, her exile having lasted for three years. She re-entered the metropolis as young and as beautiful as ever. Madame

[1] Chateaubriand. *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 464.
[2] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 259.

Lenormant wrote, with truth, that to her always powerful prestige, she added the aureole of persecution and devotion. She often repeated that nothing pleased her more than the happiness of her friends, so in this respect she enjoyed every felicitation. Murat and his wife saw their ignominies and betrayals recompensed by a confirmation of the crown of Naples. Bernadotte, who had turned the Prussian guns on the French at Leipzig, was created Prince of Sweden, whilst waiting for the sovereignty. Benjamin Constant, who had acted as his secretary during the campaign, re-entered France in this Prince's suite. Moreau had been unfortunate. But in compensation for his death, and as a recompense for his dishonour, the King created his widow a "marshal." Queen Hortense was somewhat ashamed of her title, which did not seem good enough amidst the crowd of emigrants who hustled round the throne. She exchanged it for that of Duchesse de Saint-Leu, a modest name, but of better quality and more substantial. She also pledged herself to the royalists by asking Madame Récamier to present her to Wellington. The Duc de Rohan-Chabot, after having been chamberlain to the Emperor, and friend to the Queen of Naples, became an officer in the regiment of musketeers attached to the King's household.[1] Alexis de Noailles was appointed royal commissary at Lyons. The Marquis d'Osmond, father of Madame de Boigne, was named ambassador at Turin. Mathieu de Montmorency became a knight of honour to the Duchesse d'Angoulême. Adrien de Montmorency, sillier and prouder than ever, was qualified for the first vacant embassy. In the meanwhile, he presented his son to Madame Récamier, and as the young man displayed an unlimited admiration for her, his father uttered the only witty remark he had ever been guilty of, and that was a hackneyed quotation.

"Ils n'en mouraient pas tous, mais tous étaient frappés."[2]

[1] For a very true, very malicious, and very piquant description of the Duke, see the Abbé de Lamennais, in his *Réflections sur l'Etat et l'Eglise.*

[2] La Fontaine. The fable of *Animaux malades de la peste.*

This allusion, comparing Madame Récamier to the plague, was not very gallant. But three generations of Montmorency-Laval, his father, himself, and his son, had fallen in love with the same women.

The royalist world was extremely active, and Paris was full of animation. The salons took a fresh lease of life with a vivacity that they had lacked during the last years of the Empire. The allied armies were in Paris, and as the allies of the King, their officers were invited to the royalist drawing-rooms. Patriotism accommodated itself to such things. Internationalism is no new invention, and the flower blossomed a century ago in the salons and at the fêtes of the aristocracy before revival in certain circles of the democracy.

During the Restoration Madame Récamier floated through a dream. Having failed to become a princess herself she delighted to rub shoulders with princesses. She stood upon a social equality with duchesses, and not merely the duchesses of imperial manufacture such as the Duchesse de Raguse, born Perregaux, and daughter of a simple banker like Monsieur Récamier, or the Duchesse de Montebello, born Guéhenneuc, or the Duchesse de Dantzic, whose family history was a problem. But Madame Récamier mixed with the real duchesses, the Duchesse de Duras, the Duchesse de Luynes, the Duchesse de Laval. Madame Récamier knew them all, and had she been the mother of a daughter she would have married her, like Madame Geoffrin, to a Monsieur de La Ferté-Imbault. She enjoyed the company of many duchesses and, for a woman of the middle-class, it was no slight honour to be admitted into the drawing-rooms of an exclusive nobility. It is not easy to form an idea of the line of demarcation that existed before 1830 between the great world and the little. The age of the Restoration was more strict in this respect than the age of Louis XVI. The members of the aristocracy considered no one but themselves. A woman of the middle-classes obtained neither approbation nor pity. For the nobility she did not exist. Residence in the Faubourg Saint-Germain could only be obtained by birth,

and the right of conquest did not exist until after 1830. Balzac and a few other men of genius forced their entrance, because of their exceptional intellectual powers. Women were not admitted for their wealth, and the barrier was hardly removed when they married into the exclusive circle.

Madame Récamier's invitation to the Faubourg Saint-Germain was not a question of money or marriage. Her friendship with the Montmorency was known. Both brothers had freely spoken of her as a friend. The world believed her to be something more, and, in consequence, the woman who had been thus honoured was entitled to be received in the most aristocratic salons. This explains why the royalist world was ready to receive this woman of another standing in society. Its manners were always those of the eighteenth century.

Happy to mix with people who did not respect her, Madame Récamier could not resist lending herself to all the petty intrigues and confederacies of the salon. She had not been a month in Paris before Madame de Staël's daughter, the daughter of her greatest friend, had pierced an artificiality that others took for naturalness. With a wit and depth that showed a superior intelligence the girl wrote: "Madame Récamier is pretty and good, but an existence of little coquetteries does not elevate the soul. It would have been much better if she had not wasted her time and her heart on every side. But she is generous and seductive." [1]

The young girl's remark is very just, but perhaps not sufficiently indulgent. Benjamin Constant probably told her of the love he had for Madame Récamier, without mentioning that lady by name.[2] Had she yet met many women belonging to the higher circles who thought of anything else but "little coquetteries," or any who dreamt of leading a life that "elevated the soul"? When, a trifle later, Albertine de Staël became Duchesse de Broglie, the

[1] *Lettres de la duchesse de Broglie*, Vol. I., p. 2. Albertine de Staël to Mademoiselle de Barante, July 13, 1814.

[2] *Journal Intime de Benjamin Constant.* "Believing that I could detach myself from Juliette by the means of cold reason, I related the story of my foolish love to Albertine without naming anybody."

wife of a doctrinaire, she was certainly convinced of these sad truths, and probably became more indulgent.

There has been a disposition to see in Madame Récamier a woman who gave the tone to the salons, and was thus able to influence her period in a marked way. This is an exaggeration.

Madame Récamier rather followed the movement—of fashion, and not of intellect—than directed it. With a little complaisance, and with a desire to humour a woman who pleases, it is easy to accommodate facts to her satisfaction, and not to the requirements of truth. In order to sum up the reputation and merit of a person who has taken an active part in the life of her time, we must judge the actual result. In Madame Récamier's case it is not very much. The deeds for which she has been so lavishly praised are not worth the glory they have received. Since the time of the Directory, Madame Récamier had been *persona grata*. Her beauty even attracted in the street. By welcoming this lady of the middle-class upon a footing of perfect equality, an appearance was given of liberal tolerance. All the parvenus, and tradesmen, were proud to see that a woman from their own ranks, a woman of the world of finance—the nobility of money—was able to mix as an equal with the titled members of the aristocracy. The middle-class pretended to despise the aristocracy. But when the day came they did not refuse to hand over their daughters, and, what was far dearer to them, their money. Madame Récamier was an actress, and nothing else. Every day she paraded like a strolling player, through the salons of the idle aristocracy. Montmorency, the Noailles, the Lamoignon, and the Nadaillac were the exact reflection, the quintessence of the society of their time. The fashionable world modelled itself upon their example. They had their prejudices, their manias, their affectations, their manners, their follies, as we have ours. The only difference is that these characteristics are not the same. They found their La Bruyère in Balzac. Whoever wishes to know the society of the Restoration, the society over which Madame Récamier ruled as one of its queens, has but to read his

works. All these worldly affairs, essentially of a passing nature, are written in the "Comédie Humaine" for the benefit of eternity.

The interminable wars of the Revolution and the Empire had finished. But they had tired every class of the state, even the military. The world thirsted for rest and peaceful pleasure. With the Restoration the reign of the salons commenced. For almost a quarter of a century woman had been effaced. Now came her revenge. The brutality and roughness of the sword had their effect upon the ordinary courtesies of life, and were succeeded by a period of polished manners. French wit struggled forth from its chains. People were able to think, write, and speak freely, without a perpetual fear that they would be denounced to the police, and ruined. Old French society, so long dispersed, gathered together afresh, with much to discuss, and many experiences to relate. The gossip of the salons spared Madame Récamier. She remained *taboo*, and sacred. Everybody in the Royalist salons knew that she had mixed in the world of the Directory. But it was agreed that she should not be reminded of the fact. Her first entry into the world was considered a secret. The person who would have permitted himself a simple allusion to the not very compromising past of the friend of Montmorency would have been regarded as lacking in every kind of education. To a certain degree intellectual subjects replaced the other pre-occupations of the salon. Literature, art, philosophy, and poetry formed the chief subjects of conversation. As if she had foreseen this change in taste, Madame Récamier found herself well provided with friends to deal with the new movement. For philosophy, she had Ballanche. For poetry, she had the great Ampère, who, although a mathematician, sometimes stood with his back to the fireplace and recited the pretty verses he scribbled in his spare moments. Then she could attract others. There were young men who wrote the most ravishing royalist poetry. Victor Hugo, for example, the son of a general, and Alphonse de Lamartine, a youth of good family. She hardly stirred from her house. Her salon

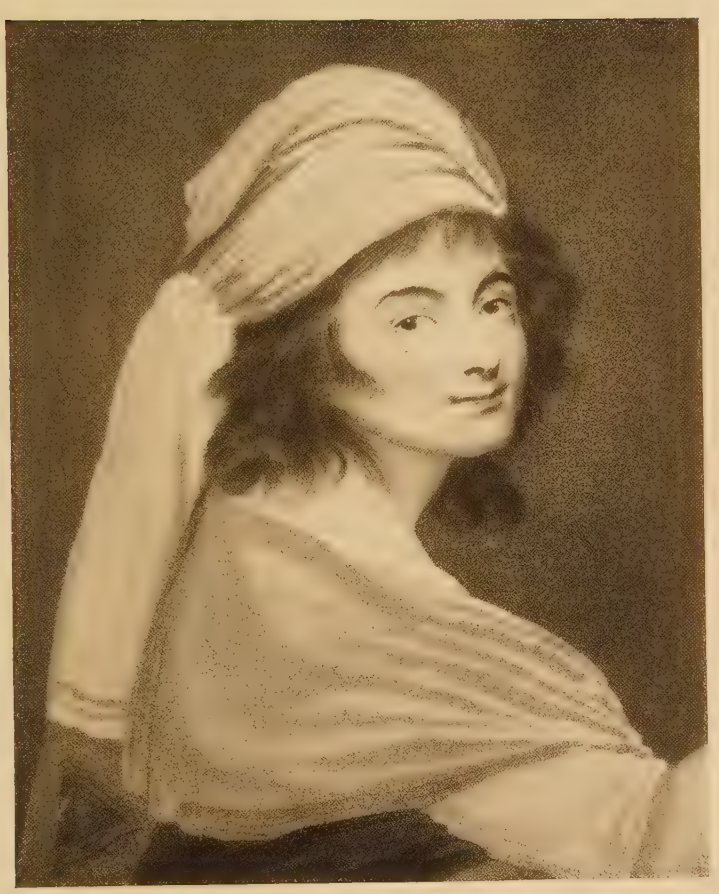
was her kingdom, and queens do not move about freely. Like a queen she received royally.[1] She was in close and intimate friendship with Madame de Genlis at this time; they lent books to each other that they had not time to read. The former mistress of Philippe Egalité, Duc d'Orléans (and of many others), had the idea of persuading "the beauty of the beauties" to write the history of her life. Did she think that Madame Récamier's existence had been as active as her own? "I am sending you the book I promised. I have marked the passages I wish you to read. Come, madame, tell your story in the same way, as one does in romances. Then I will ask you to write it in the form of reminiscences. They will be full of interest, because you were moulded, from your earliest youth, in a ravishing figure, and gifted with a refined and penetrating spirit, to be thrown into the whirlpool of error and folly. You have seen everything, yet you have preserved during these storms your religious sentiments, together with a pure soul, a character without a stain, a heart sensible of and faithful to friendship. You have neither envy nor other hateful passions. You paint everything in its true colours. You are one of the phenomena of our age, and you are certainly one of the most amiable of women.

"You will show me your souvenirs. My experience will advise you, and the result will be a useful and delightful work. Don't answer: 'I am not capable.' Such a commonplace phrase is not worthy of your intelligence. You are able to consider the past without remorse. At any period it is a beautiful privilege. To-day it is invaluable."[2]

Madame Récamier believed almost everything her admirers said. She imagined that she had all the talents, as well as an inclination towards authorship. The examples of Madame de Staël, Madame de Genlis, and the Duchesse de Duras,

[1] "I have heard the finest singer in Paris, perhaps in the world, Madame Catalani, at Madame Récamier's," February 22, 1815. Sismondi. *Lettres inédites à sa mère pendant les Cent-Jours, Revue Historique*, 1877. Madame Récamier was living at No. 32, Rue Basse-du-Rempart.

[2] Chateaubriand. *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 455.



MADAME DE GENLIS
*After a contemporary engraving*

awoke in her the spirit of emulation. With the encouragement of Madame de Genlis she tried to write down her Memoirs. But "the dissipation amidst which she lived deprived her of the slightest capacity of application and serious occupation." [1] Obliged to recognise the fact, she renounced the work soon after commencing it, and, in her will, ordered the manuscript to be burnt. The Duchesse d'Abrantès, whom she knew, soon proved that her energy was of a different stamp. As Madame de Genlis wrote: "tired of all vain amusements, wearied by frivolity, Madame Récamier gave herself up to idleness only by habit, but she proved that it was a most trying state for a person gifted with intellect and common-sense." This is well said, but it must be doubted whether Madame Récamier possessed intellect and common-sense. The question was put more than once to Sainte-Beuve when he frequented her salon. He replied: "she did not possess the intelligence which sparkles alone, but she had—in the highest degree—the intelligence which makes others shine." [2] Sainte-Beuve was a flatterer. He had no wish to explain that Madame Récamier, by her systematic praise, captivated each man so that he was bound to acknowledge publicly her intelligence. She had enough common-sense to flatter her guests, but she lacked originality, brilliance, and simplicity. She was too commonplace to have real intelligence. Without being silly she was far from being a superior woman, as Madame de Staël would like us to believe. This was the opinion of Monsieur Ravaisson-Molhen, who has recently died. He visited Madame Récamier as a young man, and preserved a vivid impression of her salon. She was atrophied by the idleness, the little vanities, and the little coquetteries of the drawing-room. She had no other powerful interest in life, for she was neither wife nor mother. She attracted eminent men, and they talked in her presence, but she heard more than she listened to. Their arguments were unable to lift her from the commonplace. She did her business with ready-made

[1] Madame de Genlis. *Mémoires*, Vol. VI., p. 107.
[2] Sainte-Beuve. *Causeries du lundi*, Vol. I., p. 136.

phrases of admiration, with loans from the theatre, with all the conventional jargon of fashionable life. This is not intelligence. She was a perfect mistress of the art of being bored without showing her weariness. Her heart, source of every beautiful action, generous thought, and originality of intelligence, had been dried up in her worship of vanity. In spite of the admiration that Madame de Genlis felt for her, that experienced lady did not shut her eyes to the truth. Noticing that Madame Récamier had not the courage to finish her memoirs, Madame de Genlis decided to write the life of her friend.

Evidently at this period, under the stress of her infatuation for Madame Récamier, Madame de Genlis wrote the idyllic romance of Prince Augustus of Prussia. Chateaubriand visited her one evening in her rooms at the Arsenal. He found her "dressed in a black robe. Her white hairs fell across her face. Between her knees was a harp, and her head was inclined upon her chest. Across the strings of the instrument, her white and thin fingers wandered in a sonorous chord, extracting a sound which trembled like the distant and indefinable voice of death. What was this old sibyl singing? It was the chant of Madame Récamier!" [1]

Amongst the invitations which bombarded Madame Récamier were many sent through interested motives. Certain persons, particularly in the Faubourg Saint Germain, had entered the imperial circle because they had not foreseen the fall of the Empire. They now found their former Bonapartist zeal a trifle embarrassing. In an endeavour to justify their conduct they could think of no better course than to cling to the skirts of Madame Récamier. At the head of this crowd was Queen Hortense. More Beauharnais than Bonaparte, troubled by the remembrance of her relations with the "usurper" and his family, yet at the same time ready to conspire in his favour, she wished to be on good terms with the Government of the Restoration. To do that it was necessary to deny her Bonapartist past. She put her title of Queen in her pocket, ready to wear it

[1] Chateaubriand. *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 412.

again if the Emperor ever returned to his throne. Her property having been created a duchy by Louis XVIII. she took the title of Duchesse de Saint-Leu. From that moment she tried to show herself in company with the best known men and women of the Restoration. One day she invited two of the Emperor's victims, Madame de Staël and Madame Récamier, to dinner. Thus she emphasised a position that permitted her to renounce a father-in-law and brother-in-law for whom she should have had a lasting gratitude. Another invitation was sent to Prince Augustus of Prussia. This was done less to please Madame Récamier than to appear a good Prussian, in other words, a good royalist. She courted everybody, as, formerly, everybody courted her. She was called a woman of character.

Madame Récamier was good-natured. She did not wish to deprive Josephine's daughter of the satisfaction of entertaining her at Saint-Leu. She went in company with Madame de Staël, and they were both able to bear witness to the insignificance of this much-praised queen.

Another queen of imperial creation, a thousand times more renegade, was Caroline Murat. She also wrote to Madame Récamier, and seemed equally to desire her protection. Too indulgent towards her crimes, Madame Récamier replied in apparent friendship. A queen must be very badly educated if she cannot find eulogists for all her vicious actions. Madame Récamier probably did not care for Caroline, but she was wrong to show any feeling in her favour. If her friendship was true, it was morally weak, for she placed on the same footing people who were honest and those who decidedly were not.

One day Madame Récamier received a letter from Caroline in which the Queen begged her to find somewhere in Paris a man who was capable of defending the royal interests at the congress of Vienna. She set out the requisite qualifications. He must have authority in politics, he must be honourable, and he must have enough skill to present adequately the titles and rights of King Joachim I. Madame Récamier was rather astonished at being chosen to select the

defender of the sovereigns of Naples. She thanked them for their mark of confidence, and proposed Benjamin Constant. They approved the name. Madame Récamier invited Benjamin Constant to call on her, and she warned him that it was a matter of business.

There was no man better able to answer the hopes of the King and Queen of Naples. Benjamin Constant had been a precocious youth, and had developed his intelligence by study, by foreign travel in England and Germany, by the knowledge of languages, and by frequenting the drawing-rooms of women of merit and distinction. In many respects he was extremely eccentric. His wit was varied, complicated, subtle. He was capable of grappling with many subjects, had in fact done so, and not always intellectually. Unhappily, his moral education was defective. His father had not proved equal to his parental duty. Cold and taciturn, he had never troubled to converse with his son. Without passions himself, he had not cared whether or not his son was passionate. He had not tried to direct the adolescent on the threshold of life. Benjamin was very handsome, and very lonely. Left to himself, he weakened his powers by seeking to acquire an experience which parents rarely dream of giving in advance to their children. For this knowledge he naturally paid dearly. Much later, he wrote: "I bitterly repent, when I think of it, having wasted my time, my money, and my health. Perhaps I am no wiser at present. At least, I am more angry with myself for gambling, for ruining myself, for being ill during the day because of my excess at night." But he never altered his method of life. This abuse of strength and nervous energy acted on him as a dry wind on the desert. He admitted that he was withered and used up, yet confessed the truth with so much wit and humour, that his own eloquence won him over to a philosophic acquiescence, and he accepted the worrying consequences of imprudences his character was not strong enough to resist. He was a man governed by impulse. Closing his eyes to embarrassments and obstacles, he did not consider whether he was likely to succeed or to fail. Happily

a strong dose of scepticism quickly cured the wounds he received in love as well as in politics.

With great gifts it is astonishing that Benjamin Constant did not reach any definite end. He was a failure, a failure of genius, but a failure all the same. He had written one masterpiece, *Adolphe*. He might have written twenty, but unfortunately he lacked character and firmness. As his masters had not dreamed of cultivating his will, his mistresses took the matter in hand. The result may be guessed. He was the prey of women, who robbed him of his energy and softened his character. Instead of producing fine works, he spent himself in idleness, in fruitless and irritating arguments, which left him sterile and exhausted.

Striving always to produce an effect, he generally took the opposite side to his interlocutor. Madame de Staël delighted in this method. Indeed she never found an antagonist so capable of giving value to her forcible conversation. Between them they kept the ball of discussion to and fro in a most vigorous manner. His assault was a perpetual series of sophisms and paradoxes. His brilliant remarks were less inspired by a search for truth and justice, than by artistic dilettantism, by a wish to pose and dazzle the crowd. These armed exercises, these duels—for they were not conversations—struck a false note. Sismondi noticed and registered the fact. Joubert, a man of delicate soul and mind, was not able to endure them. There was no evil he did not think of Benjamin Constant. He complained to Madame de Staël for taking such a lover. " I am distressed to see the fate of a woman I care for allied to that of a truly hateful man." Joubert exaggerated. Benjamin Constant did not merit his hatred any more than the hatred of Joubert's friend, the amiable Madame de Beaumont. She wrote : " I do not know if it will calm you, but Benjamin Constant is hated as much as possible."

With all, Benjamin Constant had a childish side to his nature. He revealed it in everything, in love, and in politics. It was his best side, for it was the side of his heart. For this sceptic had a heart, and this child was a man, brave,

generous, devoted, and broad-minded. His character was a collection of contradictions. He had, however, a few convictions and they contributed to make him the dupe of events, of women, and even of men. Only those who never think have definite political opinions and convictions. Talleyrand and Fouché are two examples. Because they lacked principles they have always been praised as perfect models of politicians. Benjamin Constant could have stood by the side of these two great figures if he had not been spoilt by a certain honesty. He did not set a price upon his influence, but gave it at the instigation of his heart. This explains his inferiority. It threw him into sophistry. He mocked at everything, even at what he said and what he did.

In 1814 he was forty-seven years old. His faculties were at their brightest. If his body was a trifle enfeebled there was no weakness in his mind. Never had he appeared so brilliant. Chateaubriand said that, after Voltaire, Benjamin Constant had the next finest intellect. And Madame de Staël, who had exhausted in discussion every subject—and the poor Benjamin in addition[1]—found pleasure in these disputations, even after the rupture of their intimacy. She was not exactly brilliant herself, and she loved to find in others the quality she lacked. During the fifteen years of their liaison—a friendship which degenerated into a galling chain—there had been no other reason. *Adolphe* is nothing else than a terrible recital of the agony of their love, intermingled with the author's adventures with Madame de Charrière. There is not much heart in this masterpiece of fine but distressing observation.

He read the manuscript of his little book to Madame

[1] Benjamin Constant was a grumbling lover. He could not refrain from continually disputing with the woman he loved. He already did it at twenty with Madame de Charrière who was forty-seven. He wrote to her (February 23, 1783) : " with you I have passed two very peaceful and happy months with the exception of the two or three little clouds which gathered and melted away every day." In company with Madame de Staël the clouds were more frequent and much blacker. With Madame Récamier they were one long fog.

Récamier. It is not astonishing to find that she did not care for it. She recognised the character of Madame de Staël too plainly, and also saw herself painted as the mediatrix who, in trying to reconcile the lovers, only makes matters worse. She did not care for such allusions, any more than she cared for the truth when it was fairly put. At a later period, and for a similar reason, she rejected Balzac's *Peau de chagrin*, another masterpiece that the author wished to read to her. The tall, thin Benjamin Constant seduced her no more than the stout Balzac, with his great shoulders, his bull-like chest, and his frankly natural manners. His realism did not harmonise with her artificiality.

Benjamin Constant had known Madame Récamier for ten years. He did not open the campaign with her. As always, it was she who commenced. He was well known, even celebrated. She wished to attach this handsome butterfly to her collection, and thus take a revenge for his inexplicable indifference. For a woman so worshipped studies more deeply the men who do not pay any attention to her than those who are under the power of her fascination. Madame Récamier, out of spite, decided to attempt the conquest of her friend's lover. She wished to catch a man Madame de Staël called "The Inconstant" in matters of the heart, and "my handsome weathercock" with regard to the intellect. She compelled him to change his opinions at command, and held him completely under her tutelage, ever since the day when he had broken his leading-strings, that is to say, since she refused to marry him.

More beautiful and coquettish than before, Madame Récamier "undertook" Benjamin Constant. Her coquetry was at once natural, wise, and unconscious, because it was second-nature. Hardly was she in front of a man than she commenced to exert her powers of fascination. And, with all her offhand airs, she was a little sly. She received her new friends with a hesitating familiarity. She played with a marvellously affecting innocence. A romantic attitude, with amiable little drawing-room graces, gave her an appearance of youth which was almost childish. In the

midst of women who were losing their early charms, it was doubly pleasing to men. She spared herself the trouble of thought, probably because she knew that she did not possess sufficient intellectual resources to hold a man of distinguished wit. She comprehended that the ordinary banalities were out of place and unattractive. Yet she was aware that she must reveal some pleasant quality in order not to appear one of the most stupid of women. Thus she fell back upon her usual simpering, and those little half-suppressed suggestions which succeed with most men.

Benjamin Constant understood these pretty mannerisms as a positive advance. Whilst she explained to him, in her most seductive tones, that she wished to see him on behalf of her friends, the King and Queen of Naples, she was playing her own game. She always commenced in the same manner, and a clever woman, who knew her well, and studied her closely, reveals the secret. "All these authors and artists heard the same formula of admiration from the lips of Madame Récamier, when they entered her house for the first time. In a soft and vibrating voice she greeted them with the words: "'The emotion I feel at the sight of so superior a man does not permit my showing as I could wish all my admiration, all my sympathy . . . But you can guess . . . You understand . . . My admiration has said enough . . . .'

"These praises, delivered with a calculated hesitation, interrupted sentences, soft and agitated looks, made the visitor feel a true emotion, which he exchanged for the artificial emotion which welcomed him.

"Madame Récamier owed her great success to this artifice of universal flattery. It never altered, and was sufficient to gather round her the most eminent men of our time.

"It must be added that these words were said almost in a whisper, so that they could only be heard by the person to whom they were addressed. She uttered them with infinite grace. Although she had not the spirit of conversation, she

possessed to an extreme degree the wit and cleverness necessary to arrive at any aim she desired. When she decided that a certain well-known man should take part in her re-unions, she threw innumerable invisible wires across his path, and he was very adroit if he managed to escape." [1]

Benjamin Constant did not know how to escape. Delighted by these expert flatteries, in which he saw no malice, he was wrong to take a hand in the game, and to treat so seriously the interest she affected towards him. He thought she offered him her heart. Already in love, he held out his arms to seize the wished-for happiness. Unfortunately he learnt once more that women were created to make us suffer, and that we suffer most at the hands of those we love. But, since he had known Madame Récamier for ten years, why did he now fall so suddenly in love with her, if she did not show the way? Read his *Journal Intime.* " 1814. I passed the evening with Madame Récamier. This woman, with whom I have lived in Switzerland, whom I have seen on different occasions, and in every manner, who has never made the slightest impression on me, suddenly inspired in me a violent sentiment. Am I a fool or a beast? But I hope all this will pass.

" Alas! It does not pass away. This frightful passionate fever, which I know only too well, has invaded me, and dominates me absolutely. Work, politics, literature—all are over. Juliette's reign commences. The action, which has thrown me into this irresistible torment of heart and mind, was apparently futile. The Murats have asked me through Juliette (who is under an obligation to them) to give advice and help. Juliette's wish to succeed, the seductions she has employed, her confidential conferences, have resulted in turning my head. I feel it. Yet I know the danger to which I am exposed. She is frankly a coquette, but the charm and difficulty of conquering her drags me forward." [2]

[1] Madame Ancelot. *Foyers éteints*, p. 171.

[2] *Journal Intime de Benjamin Constant*, published by Madame Dora Melegari.

Independently of the *Journal Intime*, rough notes for the memoirs he proposed to write later, and which death did not permit him to begin, Benjamin Constant kept a daily list of subjects to be referred to in the projected memoirs. Under the date of 1814, we find: "Madame has put it into her head to make me fall in love with her. I am forty-seven years old. She has given me a rendezvous under the pretext of some business relative to Murat. 31st August. Her behaviour to me this evening. 'Dare,' she said. I leave her foolishly in love. My life is topsy-turvy. An invitation to Angervilliers.[1] Coquetry and firmness of Madame Récamier. I am the most unhappy of men." [2] Comparing these lines with those in the *Journal Intime*, we find that one is confirmed by the other. "September.—This woman inconceivably agitates me, and torments my life. I am growing old because of it. I go anyway, what do I care? Everything helps to kill time. My blood is on fire. I have seen her alone; never was there more coquetry, and that is her charm. I find it impossible to discover whether I have made the slightest progress in her heart, or even whether she has pity for me. This evening, after missing an appointment she had given me, her slight regret suffocated me. I left her in convulsions, sorrow, and rage at loving her at all."

Madame Récamier probably realised to what a degree she had bewitched Benjamin Constant. The master scoffer, who ceased to scoff because he had been so gravely wounded, did not allow her to ignore the true facts. "I am clinging to a steep incline," he wrote to her in a letter, dated September, 1814. "Must you make me suffer in this way? The angels also are cruel. Do you know that you have tried to make me foolish? What will you do if I am?" [3]

On the September 3rd, he wrote: "Take care. You are able to make me so unhappy that you will not escape being

[1] The residence of Madame de Catellan.

[2] From the *Carnet de Benjamin Constant* in Sainte-Beuve's *Portraits littéraires*, Vol. III., p. 282.

[3] *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à Madame Récamier.*

unhappy yourself. I have had but one single thought, it is —according to your wish—the thought of you. Politics, society, all have disappeared. Perhaps I seem a fool to you. But I repeat your words, study your looks, that air of a schoolgirl which embraces so much grace and elegance. I have reasons for my foolishness. I should be foolish not to be a fool. Until this evening then. You are the most indifferent of women. How much you make me suffer." [1]

This was the cause of his sufferings. She was indifferent, in spite of her habit of interesting herself specially in each of the little affairs of her friends. She took no pleasure in robbing a man of his heart, and then sacrificing him. She was not wholly wicked. But her trade was that of a coquette, and it was unfortunate for the person she exercised her profession upon. Her heart was an open drawing-room. The coquette challenged each comer, and then gave not the slightest recompense. We do not blame her for that, but we do blame her for provoking Benjamin Constant to wander upon such dangerous ground, whilst knowing that she would refuse the passions she wished to excite. Benjamin Constant was not a simpleton, and she had to mobilise all her little arts to capture him. When she recognised that she had gone too far, and that Benjamin would not be satisfied with what she offered, which passed ordinary friendship and yet did not attain love, she beat a retreat. But the evil was done. Imprudently she had set fire to the house, and was astonished to see it burning. Her conscience permitted her to throw a few glasses of water over the conflagration, but they were not sufficient to extinguish the flames. Love could only be driven out of the poor Benjamin when his heart and soul were burnt and calcined. This unhappy love was his last. It left him worn out, like a tree struck by lightning with its foliage shrivelled.

Benjamin Constant feared that Madame Récamier's pride was wounded, because he had not paid attention to her earlier. He tried to excuse himself. "All the charm that I have always dreaded has entered my heart." He speaks

[1] *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à Madame Récamier.*

of himself as a man, who " before loving you, and you alone, felt himself always drawn towards you." [1] He does not wish to be thought indiscreet. " I fear you will think me wrong because I have written to you so much." He perceived that Madame Récamier avoided him. " I am afflicted, because, although many people find me witty and amusing, you are evidently unable to agree with them, for immediately I arrive you go." He asked for an explanation of such conduct. She resisted, but very gently, and demanded where this passion would be likely to lead him.

" This passion," he answered, " is no ordinary passion. It is all ardour. It has no limits. It puts at your disposition a clever, devoted, courageous, sensible, and disinterested man, to whom, until this moment, all these qualities have been useless, because they have lacked the necessary good reason to govern them. Now, why cannot you be that superior reason ? "

But Madame Récamier saw no sense in undertaking these duties. Fouché had used the same words to her in 1805. He also had wished her to become the " superior reason " of the Emperor. Her friends persuaded her otherwise. She turned from Benjamin. She recognised the truth of the portrait he drew of himself. The idea that he had of his talents was not exaggerated.

" Why do you not permit me to be your closest friend ? " said the lover tenderly. But Madame Récamier did not reply. The Emperor had also desired to be her closest friend, and she knew that the friend of a woman quickly demands advancement, and does not cease until he has obtained all his desires. Then follow commands, refusals, quarrels, recriminations, scenes, worries of all kinds, and at last love disappears. Madame Récamier wished for a calm and peaceful life, and mistrustful of him, she no longer received Monsieur de Constant when she was alone. She had made him fall in love with her, and that was all she wanted. She was contented with herself, and he ought on his part to remain in the same happy state and leave her

[1] *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à Madame Récamier.*

alone. She hardly deigned to answer his letters. When she did so, it was in a very off-hand manner.

"Have you read the letter I sent you yesterday?" he demanded. "I ask you a thousand questions in each letter. You never answer a word, and when I see you I cannot get a reply." The lover went so far as to implore her pity, and referred to his very real sufferings. He promised never to complain, in a line full of anguish. "I have more character than people think—when I have character." He could confront a pack of tigers without turning pale, but before her he had not the slightest nerve. "Juliette, Juliette, do not become so cold again. It will cost me my sanity. You have seen me when you tried to end our friendship. Every one has seen me in the state to which I am reduced, without restraint, without strength, and speaking like a dying man or a mad person." And now that he believed himself to be treating the question reasonably he spoke of flying to America. Then, in the next letter he abandoned this project. "I am resigned. I submit. You are my religion. I love you with a frenzied passion. For a year with you I would offer a thousand years of my life."

Madame Récamier did not care for true passion, which troubled her soft and serene beatitude. Little drawing-room compliments, "sweet, tender, and languorous," which signified nothing, a quiet conversation in a corner hidden by a curtain, these pleased her when they did not shrivel up the heart or the features. But great passions, with deep sentiments, high-sounding words, dramatic gestures must be left to Talma. And then her husband, with his practical mind, would say to her—as he said in the case of Lucien Bonaparte, or for the Prince Augustus of Prussia, "Whither will it lead you?" A wise woman does not allow herself to be led by the blind. A lover is never anything else, and Benjamin was a lover. Madame Récamier wished to know where she was going. She always remained completely mistress of herself. The foolish Montrond failed to compromise her in 1805. Yet his agreeable manners and alluring air of conquest were infinitely more pleasant to her

than the long thin face of Benjamin Constant with his appearance of a pious German professor. Tongues began to wag,[1] but she had many friends, and they kept a good guard.

Benjamin Constant did not consider himself beaten. He continued to write, keeping the door half-open, and thus ready for any favourable incident. For the moment he thought it advisable to damp down his passion. "You may well believe that I am not coming to speak to you of love. You have rejected it so strongly, that perhaps it is destroyed." He knew well that it was not destroyed, but he assumed the attitude in order to be admitted to her salon on the old footing, "without pretension, without hope, simply one in the crowd of your friends, from whom I have not deserved the penalty of being struck out." Madame Récamier kept him gasping for her reply. When it arrived, he found it favourable, and the poor lover was delirious. "I thank you as if you had saved my life . . . I am beginning to breathe again . . . I walk with effort in my room, holding to the furniture to stop myself from running to you." These are the hyperboles of language, a habit he had fallen into since the "whirlwind" with Madame de Staël. But he had fallen into another bad habit, which was more annoying. He created scenes. Hardly had he returned to his accustomed place than the storms recommenced. Madame Récamier did not understand them, unless such events are the supreme joy of the coquette, who amuses herself as she contemplates the tempest from a distance. *Suave mari magno.* . . .

As she did not refer to the subject Benjamin again started talking of love. If Madame Récamier possessed a heart, she decidedly did not intend to share it with him. He wrote: "I believe that you do not read my letters. You do not love me at all. I know it. You stifle my words. You only care for one thing, and that, not to witness my misery. That I am dying far away from you does not trouble you in the slightest. I have decided to save you from myself.

[1] General Thiébault. *Mémoires*, Vol. III., p. 495-497.

I promise it. I will do it, all is ready, and I have made up my mind for some time." But he was not quite so decided, for, after having written this letter, he scribbled in his *Journal Intime*: "I see that she becomes each day colder and more reasonable. I have a horror for her. I will never see her again, if that will grieve her. I would give ten years of my life that she might suffer half what I have suffered." How can a lover desire such happiness for his mistress?

## CHAPTER VII

IN relating the story of Benjamin Constant I do not pretend to tell a simple love episode, or even the history of a Werther—to whose temperament his own was somewhat akin. I wish only to reveal the man and his character, or rather his lack of character, whilst caught by a love for a great coquette. Madame Récamier disliked public gossip. After his declarations she feared that he might commit some act of despair. She endeavoured to calm him. She assured him that she had not the slightest wish to be rid of him, and that on the contrary she would welcome him with pleasure.

When Benjamin Constant's inclinations were opposed he always threatened to kill himself. Both Madame de Staël and Madame Récamier suffered from the same weakness. Benjamin behaved wildly in front of Madame Récamier and she hardly merited such violent scenes. In order to prevent their recurrence she took the precaution to keep her niece by her side, the child who was afterwards known as Madame Lenormant. The poor lover was thus obliged to restrain himself, and he did not succeed very well. Madame Lenormant told Sainte-Beuve later, that she once said after the departure of Benjamin Constant :

" Oh, aunt ! How ill that gentleman is to-day ! "

With his heart in tatters, Benjamin continued to visit Madame Récamier. He found in the room a third party who displeased him supremely. Monsieur de Forbin had formerly been in love with the Princess Pauline. He has been described as " the least natural, the most affected, and

BENJAMIN CONSTANT
*After a contemporary engraving*

the greatest comedian in the world." He pleased Madame Récamier, who, apart from her modesty, was a Forbin in petticoats. Every woman who feels that she is loved is a despot, and Madame Récamier's friendship with Forbin was the despair of a sincere lover like Benjamin Constant. He became jealous of Monsieur Forbin, and did not hide the fact. Jealousy was not to Madame Récamier's taste. Monsieur Forbin saw it, and strong in her support, gave himself airs. This attitude further displeased Monsieur de Constant. The question of a duel arose, and, as that involved too much trumpeting for the delicate ears of Madame Récamier, she became extremely disturbed. Benjamin had written to her : " if your door is closed to me, I know his. And one of us will not pass from it alive." It was wicked to be so jealous. Such sentiments were out of place in a drawing-room, where one spoke in whispers, where the light of day, or of lamps, was always softly shaded, where a word said louder than another sounded like a detonation, where twenty lovers considered the mistress of the house as the equal of a queen. These attendants of the seraglio formed a permanent court. They were not jealous of each other. Each one contented himself with the trifling graces she dispensed, imagining that he was the only favourite and that the others received nothing. All these men were happy. Why could not Benjamin Constant have shared their delight ?

The disposition of the excellent Benjamin towards Monsieur de Forbin portended a general butchery. He had written to her : " After the happiness of possessing you, there is one I place almost by its side, and that is to strike down the man who has spoilt my life and then to die." He allowed her to understand that he had provoked the annoying Monsieur de Forbin. A duel had been arranged for the next day. Then came Madame Récamier with an air of distressing desolation. She lifted her voice in lamentation, and made many " tender promises " if Benjamin would not fight. The witnesses supported her, and the affair was arranged. In his *Journal Intime*, however, Constant wrote, " we both

promised ourselves that at the next disturbance each should fall upon the other." [1]

Madame Récamier was overjoyed at the result. However, men who spoke and acted as men and not as children or marionettes were unable to please this sweet and soft doll. This sugared person preferred to listen to soothing words. Lovers she did not need, but rather emasculated neuters, stuffed beings, pompously imbecile and pompously dignified, able only to chatter about worldly trifles in fashionable and worn-out phrases. Adrien de Montmorency was such a man. Benjamin Constant was too fiery. She must send him packing.

She did not answer his letters. Benjamin complained. " I am always writing to you, but you never answer me, and I submit to your silence as I submit to all your wishes." Benjamin Constant threw up his capitulations and commenced to quarrel again. There was decidedly no love in the accompaniment, and the music was forced. But it is amusing to note that the lover sometimes offered home truths to the coquette. " You are not one of those women who are more indifferent as they are more sure of being loved." " You charm everybody, but you are not able to give happiness to anybody." " Soon I will cease to write to you. Your life will settle down to that animated repose which suits you, while it deceives as to the evil you do . . . Sometimes you have wished to do good, and I thank you for your useless efforts." The lion made his claws felt. Perhaps his manner was not altogether desirable, but there was much spirit in it.

After having written to Madame Récamier, Benjamin Constant set down his impressions in his *Journal Intime.* Naturally they are more animated, stronger in colour, and more sincere than those he paraded before the adored one. " By my faith, I renounce her ! She has made me pass a

[1] The duel took place long after their griefs had been forgotten. Benjamin Constant was so ill that he had to sit in a chair as he held his pistol. The Conventional Couthon had fought in the same manner.

diabolical day. She has the brains of a bird. She is a cloud, without memory, without discernment, without a preference. Her beauty having made her the object of continual homage, the romantic language in which she has been addressed gives her an appearance of sensibility no deeper than her skin. Leave her in the evening, and you will never find her the same the next morning. She has so little remembrance, that the souvenir of the pleasure extracted from one intimate conversation will not move her to seek another. She behaves to everybody as she behaves to me."

Madame Récamier did not like people to utter such truths. Benjamin Constant's remarks were stinging. It was the first time she had felt such barbs. They were not to her taste. She was angry, and began to pout in silence. The lover was afraid he had wounded her, so he wrote the most beautiful phrases, and again prostrated himself at her feet. He endured this empty feast for months and months. Although the most grave political events were in progress he did not breathe a word of them to Madame Récamier. He had far more important things to say.

Murat made a proposal through Madame Récamier that Constant should pay an unofficial visit to Vienna, to defend his interests before the Congress. This semi-secret mission did not commend itself to Benjamin Constant, and Madame Récamier was also of opinion that he should not accept it. He gave a refusal. The Queen of Naples, as a recompense for the statement he had prepared, sent him twenty thousand francs and the cross of a commander of the order of the Two Sicilies. He refused them both. To have accepted them would have meant going to Vienna. He did not wish to leave Paris, or rather Madame Récamier. He was more than ever occupied with her.

He was not very exacting. He only asked from Madame Récamier fire and light, as a soldier of passage. He did not wish to be in the way. Like Ballanche, a little corner in the salon was enough for his happiness. " I would so much like to learn again," he wrote to her, " what life is without

sorrow! Why must I love you thus? You do not care!"

Then, returning to his own rooms, he considered his feelings. He did not find repulsion, but only a fear of being trapped. He was indignant at not having advanced a step since the first day. He wrote in his note-book: "there is something silly in having reached nothing with a woman I am so deeply in love with, and with whom I am often *tête-à-tête* at two o'clock in the morning."

He persevered. Madame Récamier recommended to his notice two ladies who were suffering from a reverse of fortune, and in whom she was much interested. Immediately he exerted himself in their case, and put at their disposition, *à perpétuité*, a vacant apartment in his house in the Rue Neuve-de-Berry. He even held himself ready to contribute to their expenses. Everybody went into ecstasies over the generosity of Madame Récamier. To her he sent the prettiest letters in the world, letters in which he revealed his whole heart. Here he was wrong. He should not have spoken about his affection to a woman whose only desire was to receive the declarations of every person she met. She did not mind whether she was loved or not, but she wanted to be preferred above other women. After having recognised that he was engaged with a coquette, after having pierced all her disguises, he should have had enough character to renounce her and to return to his wife. But he was too feeble to give her up, and the great scoffer became a lovelorn man. Jealousy seized him. He resented the attentions of De Nadaillac and Forbin, two stupid and conceited men for whom Madame Récamier showed a marked friendship. He did not understand that her action was merely to irritate him. He even spoke of allying himself with Forbin in order to exterminate De Nadaillac. However, Madame Récamier's persistent flirtation, and above all the course of politics, ended everything. The Duc de Broglie, soon to be the son-in-law of Madame de Staël, and as such to become an acquaintance of Madame Récamier, writes: "I was at a masked ball given by Monsieur Greffulhe. No visitor

was admitted uncovered. I was masked like every one else. A person I knew well, and who did not in the least disguise her voice, took my arm, then left me, then returned to me, without speaking. She was Madame Récamier. This behaviour appeared to me very singular. I had known her for some years, had often passed days in her company, even weeks in the country. Yet I had never been amongst the admirers of her beauty, or the object of those banal preferences that she lavished on every comer, big or little, young or old, beautiful or ugly, stupid or wise. These intimacies were in all good honour. She only intended to exercise herself in the art of pleasing, and to keep her hand in practice. Her flagrant coquetry, on the one side with Benjamin Constant, and on the other with Auguste de Forbin, annoyed me, for I was simply an instrument on which she played. In pretending to occupy herself with me, she laughed at their reciprocal jealousy. Under my mask, I was Forbin for Benjamin Constant, and Benjamin Constant for Forbin. This proves that she mocked at them both. I cut short this charitable pastime, which was not agreeable to my position or my character, and could only lead me into two silly quarrels. I left the ball before midnight, and, if my memory is to be relied upon, it was then I heard for the first time a whisper that the Emperor had landed at Cannes."

Madame Récamier's spirit did not ripen with years. She never became serious. Frivolous she was under the Directory, and under the Consulate, and frivolous she remained. Possibly she imagined that it made her appear young. But she forgot that whilst preserving her youth she could yet assume a dignity and gravity as seductive as the calculated tricks of her absurd coquetry. She should have looked at the charming Duchesse de Broglie, Albertine de Staël, whom she had seen in her cradle, and to whom she had acted as a model. But she was not able to elevate her soul to this exalted perfection, and to her last day she bore the imprint of frivolity. She was compounded of unworthy material. Her heart was too dry to understand the generous flames

of a superior nature. Beyond the little diplomacies of the drawing-room, the vulgar flatteries, which were always interested, nothing could be asked from her. The women of the eighteenth century were far deeper. They were light-hearted, frivolous, they took a pleasure in living, and wanted to live as long as possible, but when they entered the forties, and youth was behind and not before them, they revealed another side of their nature. They were educated, they had good taste, were sometimes even moral. They became true women, and no longer remained girls. Madame Récamier was too much of a girl. Like Madame du Deffand —although it is impossible to compare her to that lady for intelligence—she feared ennui, and, in order not to fall into the pit of boredom, she surrounded herself with a safe "parapet" of admirers. Her life was passed in presiding over a circle of sighing admirers, which her vanity chose from amongst the most celebrated men of her time. Her inviolable virtue was not altogether a merit. The Margravine of Bayreuth wrote to her brother, Frederick the Great: "My virtue is not a great glory. I am of opinion that virtue consists of resisting temptation. As I am not exposed to any, and as I am not at all susceptible, I cannot be vain of a merit which is innate."

The news came that Bonaparte had unquestionably disembarked in Provence. "I throw myself wholly on the side of the Bourbons," wrote Benjamin in his note-book. "Madame Récamier encourages me." But the society which gravitated around her was in extraordinary disarray. Auguste de Staël pressed his mother's friend to escape at once, and offered to accompany her to Switzerland. Madame de Staël herself came to say that it was absolutely necessary that she should leave Paris. Benjamin Constant, always devoted, placed twenty thousand francs (£800) at her disposal. He said that her husband, at such a stormy moment, might have some difficulty in realising his funds. She could return the money when she was able. At this mark of devotion the ice was broken, and an *entente* entered into. Benjamin forgot his liberal tendencies, and became

a fervent royalist. As Napoleon drew near to Paris, Constant burnt his boats, and published in the *Débats*, on March 19, an article with this celebrated phrase: "I will not, with miserable subterfuge, drag myself from one power to another, covering infamy by sophisms, and stammering profaned words to regain a shameful life."

Madame Lenormant declared that "the desire to please Madame Récamier was not the only motive which moved Benjamin Constant to write this article." [1] The words in his note-book: "I throw myself wholly on the side of the Bourbons; Madame Récamier encourages me," are however a proof that this "desire to please" formed the essential factor in his determination. Chateaubriand, who received his information from Madame Récamier, when citing the conclusion of the article in the *Débats*, added: "Benjamin Constant was writing for the woman who inspired these noble sentiments. . . ." [2] We know that Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* were read to Madame Récamier, and that she made comments on the work, which thus received an official stamp. Without a doubt she inspired the famous article, although she dictated nothing. Benjamin Constant explained the matter later in the same way to his friend Monsieur de Barante. The desire to please Madame Récamier was intensified by a more lively feeling, jealousy. Monsieur de Forbin came every evening to Madame Récamier's house, clothed in a uniform which monopolised all the hostess's attention. Benjamin was annoyed, and did not wish to remain in the background. So with his pen he did what the Gascon pretended to do with his sword. "Monsieur de Forbin's great sword was my downfall," he declared. "I also wished to show my devotion. I returned home, and wrote the article for the *Journal des Débats*." [3]

It brought him many compliments. But Madame, who was responsible for it, did not praise it. So he remarked to her:

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 278.
[2] Chateaubriand: *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 458.
[3] De Barante. *Souvenirs*, Vol. II., p. 128.

" I am pleased that my article has appeared.[1] Here is a letter written to me by one who has read it. If I received such a letter from some one else I could dance on the scaffold." The joy was not for him. He never stood on a scaffold. He was told that he was in danger, and that he would shortly be arrested. Then he wrote to Madame Récamier : " Pardon me if I profit from circumstances to importune you, but the occasion is too good. My fate will surely be decided in four or five days. Although you are pleased not to believe it, I am, with Marmont, Chateaubriand, and Lainé, one of the four most compromised men in France. It is certain that if we do not triumph within the next eight days, I shall be proscribed, or a fugitive, in a cell, or shot. Accord me then, during the two or three days before the battle, as much of your time as you are able. If I die you will be pleased to remember that you have given me this pleasure, and you will be sorry to have afflicted me. My feeling for you is my life. A sign of indifference is worse to me now than the news of my sentence to death will be in four days. And, when I feel that danger is a means of obtaining from you a mark of interest, I experience nothing but joy.

" Are you pleased with my article, and do you know what is said about it ? " [2]

Benjamin was already deeply compromised as much as possible. Madame Récamier was not grateful for an action, which, intended to give her pleasure, could only provoke the wrath of Napoleon when he returned to the Tuileries.

She did not display any interest. Considering that it was better to keep his liberty than to lose it, Benjamin left for Nantes. On the road he learned that the town was so strongly Bonapartist that his friend the prefect, Monsieur de Barante, had fled. So Benjamin at once returned to Paris. He was unable to live far from Madame Récamier. Her refusal to recognise his devotion moved him to a deter-

[1] Did Madame Récamier know about the article before its insertion ?

[2] Chateaubriand : *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 456.

mination very different from his original desire to please her. Instead of police officers waiting upon him, negotiators arrived. He was asked, on the part of the Emperor, to go to the Tuileries. At first he hesitated. He felt himself compromised. His tempters insisted, telling him that Lafayette was already in the palace, that the constitutional party had followed him, and pronounced in favour of the Empire. He gave way. Napoleon received him with a most gracious and irresistible manner. He spoke of the public good and devotion to the ideals of the country, and secured a promise to unite under the Empire to save France. He told Constant that the aid of his genius was indispensable. In brief Napoleon flattered his feelings of generosity, his legitimate ambition, and also his vanity. When Benjamin Constant left the palace it was as a Councillor of State.

We do not know how he announced the news to Madame Récamier. Madame Lenormant does not mention it, and his notes are also mute on the subject. It is probable that he was slightly embarrassed. But in Letter LXXIX.,[1] probably the first he sent to Madame Récamier after the interview, he writes as follows: "Cursed be the profession of courtier or politician! I think I will resign to-morrow, and I am quite sure I would do it if I believed that it would give you pleasure." He asked permission to return and see her, and to obtain the favour he flattered her curiosity. "I have had the most curious conversations. If you are curious my story will be well worth hearing." She was curious. She preferred to be behind the scenes and to manipulate the strings. She proposed to make use of the Emperor's councillor. So she re-admitted to her circle the man who was now known as "the deserter."

The irritation against Benjamin Constant in the royalist camp was very bitter. It was not confined to the violent and inflammatory members of the group, but was also felt by the moderates. They tried to quarrel with him even on the neutral ground of Madame Récamier's drawing-room. She had friends of all shades

[1] *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à Madame Récamier.*

of opinion, and, being a practical woman, did not wish to lose them. Monsieur de Montlosier, who had just published an essay on the feudal age, discussed his book one evening with Benjamin Constant. Although he was a liberal, he did not admire the sudden renegation of the new Councillor of State. He admitted that certain things were permissible, but he considered that in mere decency some time must elapse to allow the first to be forgotten before engaging in the second. During the argument, Benjamin, without thought, wounded him with one of those biting, piquant epigrams which were ever on the tip of his tongue. Monsieur de Montlosier was not in the humour to appreciate the pleasantry. Wit and finesse were not in his line. Instead of receiving the ball and returning it gaily to his adversary, he became angry, and cried :

" You are stupid."

Stupidity was the last accusation to apply to the most intelligent man in France. Constant was more disposed to give lessons than to receive them. He resented the insult, and a meeting was arranged for the next morning, so that they might decide, with sword in hand, which of the two was the more stupid.

Madame Récamier was in despair. She knew that a duel between two men of such celebrity would give her salon an unpleasant notoriety. Her character, too, could hardly escape—and this touched her to the quick. She endeavoured to suppress the quarrel, but Benjamin Constant refused to consider any arrangement. The insult had been public, and his vengeance must be the same. However, he promised to spare his adversary.

After having passed the night in arranging his affairs private as well as public, he wrote to the Emperor and Madame Récamier. The letters were only to be delivered in case of his death. Then he went to the field of honour. At almost the first pass he pricked his opponent in the hand, and the witnesses separated the combatants. Returning home, he wrote to Madame Récamier : " the business is over, not precisely as you ordered, but very nearly. Monsieur de

Montlosier was wounded in the hand, in such a manner that he could no longer hold his sword. That finished the matter. I was in despair at not being able to obey you in everything, but it was impossible without dishonour. There were too many witnesses, and the tale would have been repeated. I should have simply passed for a coward."

And he added, either to answer an anxiety displayed by Madame Récamier, or, more improbably, to quieten a fear which had remained mute: "it is important for people to know that the dispute was not political,[1] but concerned Monsieur de Montlosier's work. This statement shelters your drawing-room from criticism." Thus Madame Récamier was able to sleep in peace on her pillow. The reputation of her salon was saved. No one could say that in this temple of good taste, and the purest traditions of the old French society, there had been any lack of harmony. It could not be insinuated that the atmosphere was disturbed and led to duels. She was satisfied. Another letter from Benjamin reassured her. He had written it before going to the duel, and it formed part of the official history of the encounter. "I will endeavour to save you from worries. If Monsieur de Montlosier is killed I will answer that you will not be drawn in. If I am killed, I am leaving a letter for the Emperor which explains everything, and demonstrates that you have had nothing to do with the business. So, whatever happens, remain at rest."

She was relieved; but she had trembled for the good name of her salon, and even for her own reputation. Now the anxiety was over she could not help thinking that Benjamin Constant was very aggressive. He did not allow himself to be insulted either by the glorious Forbin or by the choleric Montlosier! His wish to take her affection seriously was disturbing. Love in a drawing-room is never serious.

In spite of Madame Récamier, of himself, of his work, of his political evolutions, and his duels, Benjamin Constant remained in love. Colder, and more circumspect than ever,

[1] However, it was nothing else. Read Monsieur de Montlosier's letter in *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à Madame Récamier*, p. 183.

she made him despair. In the morning he swore never to see her again. In the evening he had to clutch his furniture to resist his idea of visiting her. Of course, he went. The comedy was exactly the same as that played before the Emperor's return from Elba. Turning over the letters of Benjamin Constant, it is hard to believe that France was passing through a frightful crisis, and that the writer was occupied in saving his country by editing the *Acte Additionel*. The Councillor of State was lost in a very humble and docile lover. "I never trouble your life, I never spite you, I retire humbly as soon as I believe myself to be in the way." Another day he writes: "Do not prescribe useless hardness for a submissive, devoted, and unexacting soul." But he wrote this in the morning, when he hoped to see her. In the evening, after he had enjoyed this happiness, he wrote, "It is finished. There is nothing but the most complete indifference. There is nothing more to do with regard to love. And as for friendship? That is hardly worth the trouble with such a shrivelled soul!" [1]

This is but a fragment of what the poor lover wrote when he returned home in the evening. Yet, next day, he went back to the "shrivelled soul," for he had not the determination to cut her out of his life. It would be difficult to conceive such persistence before repeated refusals, if we did not know how cowardly a weak man will become in front of the woman he loves. Invited by Madame Récamier to a sermon, he excuses himself in the wittiest fashion. "I have a multitude of little affairs to attend to. Each one is sillier than the other, and they make me silly also. I am annoyed that I cannot join you on the path of salvation, but, let it be said without pride, I believe myself to be already more advanced than you, and so I am able to wait for you. Still, I do not the less regret an hour to be passed with you on one side and heaven on the other."

The hour of Waterloo arrived. The fall of the Emperor was also the fall of Benjamin Constant. In his letters to Madame Récamier, he does not seem to have been much

[1] *Journal Intime de Benjamin Constant.*

affected by the course of events. "Victor de Broglie, who met me, said I had the air of a man condemned to death. He attributed it to my political mortifications. Alas, you are my sorrow, my proscription, my executioner." Another time he wrote: "I recognise that I have no right to display my unhappiness. But, all the same, it is in my heart, during the last year, since the fatal day when you wished to see what impression you could produce on me." [1] At the moment Benjamin Constant had many other irons in the fire. His name was added to the list of the proscribed, but his fate did not touch her cold heart, for we find in the notebook a reference to "the hardness and indifference of Madame Récamier during persecution." [2] Even this did not prevent him from addressing a memoir to Louis XVIII., stating his adherence to the new form of government, an action he thought would rehabilitate him with Madame Récamier. But he could not break down her icy reserve. She remained unaltered, and he wrote in his *Journal Intime:* "there is a barrier between us which paralyses me."

It might be thought that he would have ceased to endeavour to demolish this barrier, but such was not the case. Madame Récamier's friends looked upon him as a political leper. Monsieur de Nadaillac became insolent, but Constant set him in his place with such decision that there was no continuation of this impudent attitude. His only desire was to gaze upon his idol, which brought intermittent passions of tears and despair. Thus he remained happy. Sometimes he met Madame de Krüdener under the roof of Madame Récamier. He soon discovered that this amiable lady was able to plead his cause with the woman he loved. To gain her goodwill he listened to her sermons. "My heart and my spirit are both sick, but they have been attracted by the consolations she promises me. Who knows but what Juliette's heart, attacked by such an ally, might not become more open to me?" [3]

[1] *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à Madame Récamier*, p. 203.
[2] Sainte-Beuve. *Portraits littéraires*, Vol. III., p. 283.
[3] *Journal Intime de Benjamin Constant.*

Benjamin Constant confessed his passion to Madame de Krüdener in absolute frankness of soul, and he was ready to swallow the bait offered by that inventor of a new religion. He was a recruit to honour her. The conversion of this sceptic, the king of scoffers, was the best advertisement that her Church could desire. His conversion would bring that of Madame Récamier, and it was for Madame Récamier that Madame de Krüdener was angling. Under the cloak of religion there was much calculation and petty intrigue. Madame de Krüdener invited Benjamin Constant to her "celestial sorceries" (to use Chateaubriand's phrase), and did her utmost to capture him.

He did not care. He confessed everything, opened his soul, revealed all the wounds of his heart. Perhaps they were both amused by these recitals. No one knew the pains of the heart better and how best to cure them than Madame de Krüdener. "Her conversation has done me much good," wrote Constant in his *Journal Intime*. "Her compassion for the love which torments me is adorable. She has promised her aid in establishing between me and Juliette a communion of souls. At the same time she has given Juliette a manuscript book. It contains no new ideas, but it has a real truth, and some features which have touched the very bottom of my soul."

In sending the manuscript to Madame Récamier, Benjamin Constant said that the book had given him comfort, and he begged to be allowed to re-read it with her. Madame Récamier preferred to read Madame de Krüdener's book alone.

Benjamin Constant found relief in his baths of mysticism with Madame de Krüdener. The softening effect of this spiritual treatment was soon felt, and the cure was marvellous. He wrote in his note-book: "Madame de Krüdener has given me a prayer which has made me burst into tears. The influence of this woman has done me much good. I have seen Juliette again with softness and calm, but I believe she is little inclined towards religious ideas. She loses herself in the coquetry which she has made her

profession,[1] and is pleased or annoyed at the sorrow she causes to the three or four admirers who surround her. Finally, she will consent to do good if it is not likely to inconvenience her. But her sighs, which she believes come from her soul, merely arise from her weariness." [2]

The lover gradually became clear-sighted. Whilst allowing for spite and vexation it must be recognised that Benjamin Constant understood marvellously well those he loved.

Madame de Krüdener was then in vogue. Interest and vanity urged the worldly crowd to her preaching, and fashion was ready to follow. Madame Récamier was too much a woman of fashion, as well as the queen of snobs, not to be seen where every one else was going, and it is easy to believe that curiosity pressed her less than a desire to imitate. Besides, she knew Madame de Krüdener, whom she had invited because that lady was in the mode and the friend of the Emperor Alexander. As the mystic had allowed her to read the pious manuscripts, it was necessary out of politeness to listen to her sermons. She went, not as a devotee who wished to gain salvation, not even as a simple seeker after curiosity, but to see and to be seen. Her toilet was brilliant. Had her aim been to distract the faithful during their prayers she achieved complete success. Her victory over Madame de Krüdener was startling, for that lady was compelled to remark that Madame Récamier's entry had upset her flock. Very dissatisfied, she complained to Benjamin Constant, who was not responsible. He was told to ask his friend to wear a simpler dress if in the future she came to humiliate herself before the Creator. Benjamin Constant always docile with the women, wrote the following pretty lines to Madame Récamier. "I am a trifle embarrassed over a commission Madame de Krüdener has given me. She begs you to make yourself as plain as you are able. She says that you dazzled every one, and that all the "souls" were troubled. She found it impossible to catch

[1] It is curious to note that this judgment is absolutely the same as that of Albertine de Staël.

*Journal Intime de Benjamin Constant.*

their attention. You are unable to resign your charm, but do not enhance it . . ." [1]

This does not show a very extraordinary fervour on the part of Madame Récamier, although Madame de Krüdener regarded her as a neophyte. It does not look as if she took this "celestial juggling" very seriously. However, Madame de Krüdener wrote at this period "La Récamier is quite converted." [2]

A diet of mysticism seasoned with prayers, meditations, and ecstasies, operated in a double sense upon the nerves of Benjamin Constant. He became appeased, and thereby, his love was purified. He hoped to find Madame Récamier in the same disposition. He imagined an ideal union of souls. Again he offered his heart to his beautiful friend, his eyes full of dreams and his spirit in the clouds. But in her presence, the reality killed his illusions, and Madame Récamier, with her affectations, appeared dry, hard, and cruel. Being a lover he passed from excessive confidence to anger, from anger to tenderness, from tenderness to tears and despair. He expressed his feelings in his letters. One day anger dominated him. "You persuade yourself that I do not suffer, in order to forget me at your convenience. Learn then that my life is a perpetual torture, that you are killing all my faculties, that you make me turn from religion, that you make me curse you, myself, every one. Do what you wish. For a year I have laid my sorrow before God. Disdain it. Invite me with ten other persons when I wish to see you alone. Time passes, death will come. You will have done evil voluntarily. Have I then no relief, no pity?"

At such a crisis comes the cure. Benjamin Constant, treated as a mouse is treated by a cat, suddenly revolted. The lines quoted show one state of his soul, but his thoughts can be studied with more precision in an extract from his *Journal Intime*. "Juliette has never treated me with greater indignity. Yesterday she gave me four appointments, and

[1] Chateaubriand. *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 160. *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à Madame Récamier.*

[2] J. de Norvins. *Mémorial*, Vol. III., p. 277.

did not keep one. And in the evening I found her a masterpiece of coquetry, perfidy, falsehood, hypocrisy, and affectation. I will return to my old habits, and become a serious man. I will use my strength, and my pen. I feel it, and I wish it."

This time, the return to reason was permanent.

Madame Récamier cannot be accused of committing a crime in having refused to listen to the love of Benjamin Constant. The harshness, for which he reproached her, was simply the result of the decision she had taken to receive his advances with coldness. She wished to discourage him. She made him understand that he could hope for little. We must not attack her, although there is just ground for a quarrel on the score of her coquetries. They were possibly less calculated than Benjamin Constant believed, because the manner was natural, and above all habitual to her. She could hardly judge when she passed the proper limit, and thus provoked a passion to which she never intended to respond. We must believe that she never desired to lead him on, for, with all her coquettish airs, she was very strait-laced. In the game, which she elevated into a profession, her chief art was to advance or retire in exact proportion to the moves of the adversary. Benjamin Constant should have laughed at her, instead of taking frivolities to the letter, and far too seriously. He wished to push to its logical conclusion a situation which should have been ended with a jest. He accepted her engaging manners as positive advances. He wished to plunge into a regular passion with her. More prudent, her other lovers treated her less seriously, and with the possible exception of Lucien, not one took her tragically. Benjamin, however, had a thousand times more intellect than any of them. He possessed enough good taste to comprehend the situation. In his lucid moments he was able to judge Madame Récamier with commonsense. Had he looked upon the affair with sanity he might have avoided much suffering. Madame Récamier would have missed some emotions, which she could well have done without, and the world would have lost a precious collection of letters, which has given us much literary pleasure.

The burden of this correspondence is a complaint wearisome by reason of its length. It is the lamentation of a drowning man struggling to reach the shore. He wrote from his heart, and for this reason the letters are worth reading. At the same time they breathe the tone of a victim, who is not always resigned to his fate, though generally obedient to his mistress, recognising the fact that he is being led to the sacrifice. There is English common sense, German phlegm, and above all French wit in these letters. Mix with these ingredients an amorous passion. Stir them with the intrigues of a professional coquette, who amuses herself by walking across the tight rope of gallantry. The result is a bundle of the most seductive letters in the world.

Liberated at last from his bondage, Benjamin Constant sometimes flattered Madame Récamier by wearing her livery. He visited her, he dined with her. Intellect had gained the ascendancy. On December 7, 1815, he wrote: "Do you know that when I consider what profit several people have got from loving me I find that you were quite right not to wish it. I would felicitate you still more if the refusal had cost you more. Now that the wound has cured I have nothing more than affection without bearing the slightest grudge." [1] Madame Récamier agreed that they were good friends, for she did not reply.

This love, which was not an intellectual passion, seems to have dried up Benjamin Constant's brain. The unhappy man stopped in the midst of his career as if his energy had been suddenly arrested. It had indeed been drained away. In provoking his affection and refusing to reward it, Madame Récamier robbed him of the few illusions that other women had left. He became a dried up and useless being. Michelet did not hesitate to attribute this impotence to his unhappy love for Madame Récamier.[2]

[1] *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à Madame Récamier.*

[2] Madame Michelet, whom I had the honour to know, gave me this as the opinion of her husband. It must be remembered, however, that Michelet did not care for Madame Récamier. He was sceptical with regard to her, and never wished to visit her house. His aversion, and also what he has written on Madame de Staël, Madame Récamier's great friend, sufficiently explain this reserve.

## CHAPTER VIII

WHILST this singular idyll was in progress, Madame Récamier, with Madame de Staël, the Duchess d'Abrantès, and all the other ladies of quality, fêted the Allies. She welcomed the Duke of Wellington because the doors of the select Faubourg Saint Germain had been opened to him. He had already been welcomed there in 1814, and the action shocked him. The Duke is reported to have said to the women who offered him flowers, and followed him to Saint-Cloud :

" Mesdames, if the French entered London, all the English would go into mourning." Madame Récamier must share with other royalists this national shame, although she had the grace to appear affronted by one of the Duke's unfortunate remarks.

Wellington declared his passion for Madame Récamier. Perhaps he was sincere, possibly he assumed the attitude because Madame de Staël (who was infatuated with him) had told the conqueror that in Paris it was good form to fall in love with Madame Récamier. In 1814 he made his declaration according to rule. It was a compliment every new-comer was obliged to pay if he wished to be reckoned amongst the men who knew how to behave. Nothing disconcerted Madame Récamier. She received this act of politeness with her most gracious smile, and allowed the visitor to understand that he was a very great man. Nobody, she remarked upon such occasions, had ever addressed to her so fine or genuine a compliment. She was profoundly touched. This meant nothing ; not any more, in fact, than the declaration. The new addition to the circle made his

best reverence, and received her sweetest smile. With a mock air of frightened modesty she begged him to be discreet. Her gesture was pretty, for she laid her forefinger upon her lips. Both were contented.

After Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington returned to Madame Récamier's drawing-room. He spoke before the Emperor's enemy as he would have spoken before an Englishwoman. His first words were, "I have thoroughly beaten him." At the same moment he dropped on his knees and gallantly took Madame Récamier's hand to impress a kiss upon it. She might have replied that Blücher and Bülow had helped him a little, but she remained coldly reserved. The Frenchwoman was hurt by words that did not sin by excess of modesty or tact, and she thus gave the noble duke a well-merited lesson. Her attitude has been loudly praised, but her coquetries towards the English almost invited their rough remarks. In receiving him as a friend she had ranged herself amongst the enemies of France. It would have been better if she had not opened her door to the duke, nor mocked at the faults of orthography in his letters. Her own spelling was not of the best, and she could certainly not write English as well as Wellington wrote French. She should have refrained from laughing at a man to whom she made a thousand advances by letters, books, and invitations.[1] Her faults were faults of conduct, not of orthography.

Madame Récamier was enjoying herself in the whirl of fashionable diversion when Madame de Staël's health gave rise to anxiety. For some while she had been unwell. One evening, on her way to a reception given by Monsieur Decazes, the minister of police, she was suddenly taken ill. Taken back to her house, she did not recover. She was said to be suffering from a dropsical complaint, but she had in reality a slow congestion of the brain, accompanied by the usual symptoms of paralysis of the legs. She only left her house to be removed to another in the Rue Neuve des Mathurins. Each day, when the weather permitted, she

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 269.

was carried into the garden. Nothing stopped the progress of the malady. Few friends came to see her. The suggestion that Benjamin Constant neglected her, as he was preoccupied with the success of his pamphlets, is untrue. On the contrary he visited her every day. Other friends were absent from Paris, or awaited her recovery. Monsieur de Barante behaved in the same manner as Benjamin Constant. He did not forget the generous feelings Madame de Staël had shown towards him ten years previously, and also her encouragement of his literary aims. Simply and naturally he talked with her at her bedside. Madame Récamier visited her also, and met Chateaubriand there. She was not the woman to pass any one without making the most gracious advances, despite the solemn gravity of the situation.

He describes the scene. "Madame de Staël was not in the drawing-room, and even unable to join us at dinner. She was unaware that the fatal hour was so close. We sat down to table. I found myself next to Madame Récamier. I had not met her for twelve years, and then only for a moment. I did not look at her; she did not look at me. We did not exchange a word. Then, towards the end of the meal, she timidly spoke to me about Madame de Staël's illness. I turned my head a little, and lifted my eyes. I am too old to-day to speak of a feeling which preserves in my memory her youth and charm, and will last as long as my life."[1]

[1] Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 462. These letters were read to Madame Récamier, and she insisted on several alterations in the parts which concerned her. There is some obscurity about the first friendship of Madame Récamier and Chateaubriand. The great writer said that Christian de Lamoignon presented him to the wife of the celebrated banker Récamier. "I found her on a sofa in a languishing pose, and, in leaving her, I asked myself whether I had seen a statue of modesty or a statue of love." Madame Récamier asked that this passage should be suppressed. He also wrote: "One morning I was with Madame de Staël. Madame Récamier suddenly entered clad in a white robe. She seated herself in the middle of a blue silk sofa. Madame de Staël continued her animated conversation, speaking with elo-

Madame de Staël died on July 14, the day upon which she commemorated year by year the anniversary of Necker's glory. But if she did not forget her father, she was herself very quickly forgotten. "Not a single regret was expressed," wrote Joubert.[1] Benjamin Constant watched her for one night, and thought no more of her the next day.

Chateaubriand had been invited by Madame Récamier under the very roof of the dying woman. He accepted the invitation, and together they helped each other to forget the dead. About this time Madame Récamier left her house in the Rue Basse-du-Rempart for another, with a garden, in the Rue d'Anjou. She bought the mansion she was to live in, and thus added to the number of distinguished women living in that street, who occupied themselves with literature.[2]

Madame Récamier had revealed herself to Chateaubriand by the side of a coffin. The great writer went to see her. "When a human being finds his destiny he refuses to believe that he has ever lost it," is one of his remarks. However, he took some time to discover that Madame Récamier was his destiny. It was not until after a year that he realised that he had been struck by a thunderbolt.

During this year, Auguste Barbier, the future author of *Iambes*, who was then a child, was often taken by his parents to Madame Récamier. He is able to give a picture of her home life, and reports an interesting conversation she had with him. Later she gave advice to the young man, who dreamed of launching into the literary life. She had listened to enough distinguished authors to give good

quence. I hardly replied. My eyes were fixed on Madame Récamier. I had never imagined anything similar, and I was more than ever discouraged. My admiration changed into a bad humour with myself. Madame Récamier left, and I did not see her again for twelve years. (*Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 373.)

[1] Joubert. *Pensées, maximes, essais et correspondance*, Vol. II. p. 425. Letter to Madame de Vintimille.

[2] The Princesse de Belgiojoso, Madame de Ludre, and Madame de Tracy.

CHATEAUBRIAND
*From the engraving by Laugier, after the portrait ly Girodet-Trioson*

counsel. "I remember," wrote Barbier, "the garden of her house in the Rue d'Anjou Saint-Honoré. Later, when I had left my class, I found myself one evening in company with her, and her father, Monsieur Bernard. She had come for a minute to pay him a visit. As there was nobody in the room but my mother and myself, she was good enough to ask me what I intended to do. I replied that my tastes were literary. 'What branch of literature?' 'The theatre, madame!'—'Tragedy, perhaps?' 'No, madame. A dramatic composition dealing with modern times, as, for example, the conspiracy of Mallet.' 'The conspiracy of Mallet!' she repeated in surprise. 'Yes, madame'—'The subject is interesting, even burning. But it is political, and at your age, monsieur, I thought ideas tended to another direction. Well, far from turning you from such a project I encourage you. Deliver yourself up to inspiration. One can do nothing if it does not please you.'

"Whilst we were there, a servant entered, announced the carriage of the Duc Mathieu de Montmorency, who wished to speak to Madame Récamier. 'Tell the Duke to come up,' cried Monsieur Bernard. 'No, father,' added Madame Récamier. 'I will go down and see him.'

"She got up, put on her hat, threw a shawl over her shoulders, and went with the lackey."[1]

Monsieur Mathieu,[2] be it said, treated his middle-class friend with slight courtesy. As a gentleman, a great lord, one of the premier peers of Christendom, a Montmorency, he might have behaved towards Madame Récamier with as much politeness as to one of his own duchesses. To send a message to a woman that he was waiting for her in his carriage, in order to say two words to her, was not an excess of good manners. Prince Louis of Prussia acted in the same way to Madame de Staël, when he aroused her at eight o'clock in the morning to speak to him. The Duc de Riche-

[1] Aug. Barbier. *Souvenirs personnels et silhouettes contemporaines*, p. 340.

[2] Mathieu was not created a duke until the Congress of Verona in 1824.

lieu had more delicacy. The Duchesse d'Abrantès having asked him for an audience, the duke, then prime minister, called upon her the same day to listen with interest to the claim she wished to lay before him. This was a refinement of good breeding which marked a man of intellect and heart, distinguishing the great lord from the vulgar bourgeois or the parvenu. Mathieu de Montmorency did not act according to his rank.

During the summer of 1818 Madame Récamier went to take the sea-baths at Dieppe. When she returned to Paris there was considerable gossip about a conference of kings to be held at Aix-la-Chapelle.[1] Conformably to the convention of November 5, 1815, they were to discuss the possibility of withdrawing the foreign troops from France without harm to their own interests. All the crowned heads, ministers, ambassadors, plenipotentiaries, and diplomatists of Europe were making appointments at Aix-la-Chapelle. Madame Récamier decided that the sea-baths had not completed her cure. A course of waters at Aix-la-Chapelle would be necessary to complete her restoration to health. She journeyed to that city. She found there the French plenipotentiaries, the Duc de Richelieu, whom she knew, Monsieur de Rayneval, Monsieur Mounier, and others. Above all, amongst the princes was Augustus of Prussia, who went in great state every evening to her house.

After imposing military ceremonies, and great reviews held by the Emperor of Russia and the King of Prussia, the Congress closed, and Madame Récamier returned to Paris. With her clever coquetry and a timid frankness, which was a little ridiculous at her age, she set herself to conquer the poet she had met by the side of the dying Madame de Staël. She knew of all his celebrated feminine friendships,

[1] The Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle was attended by the Emperors of Austria and Russia, the King of Prussia, Castlereagh, Wellington, Metternich, and many other diplomatists. The convention, signed October 9, 1818, withdrew the army of occupation from France, and admitted that government into the European concert.

Madame de Beaumont, Madame de Custine, the Duchesse de Mouchy, and the Duchesse de Duras. She thought it would be glorious to figure on his list, and to inscribe his name on her own. The illustrious author of the *Génie du christianisme* deigned to receive the court she paid him. He came to see her more and more frequently. The place of honour in the salon and at the table was kept for Monsieur the Vicomte de Chateaubriand. He quickly fell into the habit of going there to be worshipped. His brisk soldierly air and noble personality conquered Madame Récamier completely. Her coquetry had for some time been mortified by abstinence.

During the first days Montmorency and Ballanche were proud and happy of the honour their idol received through the Breton nobleman's homage, but when they saw that he had acquired a taste for the affair, and regularly returned to receive his daily tribute of incense, they were less proud, and certainly less happy. Monsieur de Montmorency was a devout Christian, but he was made of the same clay as other men. Stung to the heart by jealousy, he threw pious resignation to the winds. Chateaubriand, the author of the *Génie du christianisme*, wished to snatch from him his charming friend, and the fact scandalised him. A storm gathered. During his fits of devotion he appointed himself Madame Récamier's director, and, without revealing his aim too clearly, rather delighted in her soul's salvation. She, in spite of her apparent docility, troubled him often by her disobedience and imprudence. He took these little offences as mortifications, thanked Heaven, and endeavoured to preserve a peaceful mind. In reality he raged. Now, before Chateaubriand's assiduities, he turned up his nose, without daring to provoke a storm. He insinuated to Ballanche, who until then had been contented with the crumbs, that this third person was a disagreeable intruder who should be opposed. The morose and agitated Breton would frighten away their tranquillity and good-fellowship. The intruder would excite quarrels, thus disturbing the health of their friend. She would be compelled,

through politeness, to honour the newcomer with her commissions, favours which had hitherto been the monopoly of the philosopher.

Ballanche's philosophy collapsed before this terrible prospect. The good man had hitherto never felt the slightest jealousy. Although he had been friendly with Chateaubriand for twelve or fourteen years, as soon as he understood from Mathieu that his happiness was menaced he found a thousand reasons to unite forces with the descendant of the crusaders against the common enemy. Mathieu suggested that to prevent Madame Récamier from thinking of this cursed Breton he should talk piety to her. Ballanche shook his head at this idea, and made another proposition. She must be engaged in a heavy literary task which might change her ideas—for instance, a translation of Petrarch. The two friends, now doctors of souls, imparted their views to Madame Récamier, and prescribed the remedy. She was to receive the encumbering Breton as little as possible, and to translate Petrarch into French verse.

Madame Récamier willingly promised to follow the second part of the prescription. So, when Chateaubriand did not come, she picked up her Petrarch, and, her thoughts occupied with the absent one, dipped into the translation. The subject inspired her. Ballanche was delighted. But no man is so childish as a professional poet and philosopher and in this case there was an added blindness. He did not perceive that his Petrarch was exactly the author to add fuel to the fire.

Montmorency on his side thought it his duty to address a few words to her on the subject of Chateaubriand's attention. She did not reply. At last she sent him a note, and Montmorency wrote: "I opened your letter with much emotion. It is more acceptable to me than your extraordinary silence. I do not know how to explain or account for your sudden coldness." He ended the complaint with a bitter cry. "Oh! Madame, what a rapid progress this evil has made in a few weeks. Your most faithful friends are beginning to have fears." Believing that the case was

desperate he begged her to have recourse to God. "I pray to Him to sustain you, to lighten your path, and with His powerful aid to prevent you from entangling yourself in an unhappy bond, which would make others miserable as well as yourself." [1]

Madame Récamier recognised that her two friends were acting in league against her, and she became irritated at the jealousy and pretention of Mathieu, seconded by the good Ballanche. She had no desire to be held in leading strings. She refused to take further doses of Petrarch. In order to prove to her censors that she intended to preserve liberty of action, she paid marked attention to Chateaubriand and neglected the distressed and angry regards of Mathieu. She was not in the humour to read his letters and homilies.

Ballanche wrote to her also. At first it was chiefly in the interest of her moral cure, and to persuade her to add a little music to her daily portion of Petrarch. She must conquer temptation by hard work, and sweeten the translation with harmony. "Occupation will do you good. Your suffering and dreaming imagination has need of food. Take care of your health. Mistrust your nerves. You are an angel somewhat liable to go astray on this earth of tumult and lies." [2] In another letter he recommended her not to neglect Petrarch. He found that she was not applying herself to the task with sufficient seriousness. "You must fight harder against the difficulties of Petrarch." He spoke of the glory she would gain through such a task, and flattered her talents. Fearing at last that, through continual repetition, he might seem to her to be in his dotage, he remarked in a charming letter: "I suppose that I appear at the present as a man preoccupied with a single idea. My letters always say the same thing to you."

In the midst of the entanglement of these diverse passions Chateaubriand shook his Olympian head, and smilingly

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 313-315.

[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. I., p. 309.

surveyed the dismay he had created. Accustomed to success, he found his action natural, and it amused him. As Madame Récamier hardly listened to Montmorency and Ballanche, they resigned themselves to their position, hoping much from the inconstancy of the two spoiled infants. Then Madame Récamier attempted to satisfy them all. She gave her confidence to Mathieu, her commissions to Ballanche, and everything else—heart as well as soul—to the noble Vicomte de Chateaubriand.

At this time Chateaubriand was intending to sell his property of the "Vallée-aux-Loups." Madame Récamier had hired half of it with Mathieu de Montmorency, and the Duchesse de Broglie wrote a charming letter in connection with the affair. "July 19, 1819. I picture your little household of the Val-du-Loup, as the most gracious in the world. But, when Mathieu's biography is written in the 'Lives of the Saints,' remember that this *tête-à-tête* with the most beautiful and most admired woman of her time will be a funny chapter."

The chapter would have been edifying, and not very long. When Chateaubriand, always improvident, was compelled to sell this small estate with such a pretty name, Madame Récamier formed a project to buy it in partnership with Mathieu. It would have been a means of calming his jealousy, but she was obliged to forego giving him such a satisfaction. Monsieur Récamier experienced a fresh reverse of fortune, and £4,000 belonging to his wife's fortune was lost.

Not only had she to give up the thought of buying the "Vallée-aux-Loups," but she was obliged to sell the house that she had bought a short while previously. She did not wish to be engulfed in domestic affairs, she could not live in a mean household, she would not refuse to see her friends. So she resolved to take an apartment in the Abbaye-aux-Bois. Madame Lenormant tells us that she had the idea, because the Marquise de Montmirail, mother-in-law of the Duc de Doudeauville, had taken up residence in the same place. No doubt her inclination was influenced by the

thought that the Montmorencys, on their way to visit their relation, would rest for a moment beneath her roof. She attached much importance to these friendships with the nobly born.

To shut herself up in a semi-convent was a great sacrifice. She was almost ruined, yet, for many women of good birth her ruin would have been wealth. There remained enough for Madame Récamier to live at the Abbaye without privation. She had several servants, and a footman to open the door. These were her strict necessities. She never suffered from that terrible malady Rabelais calls "lack of money."

She was not obliged in this convent to renounce the happiness of her life, her salon. She did not close the great book in which she had registered the names of her admirers. The world does not love people who have been ruined, and flees from them as from the plague. Her custom had been to live in society. For a long while she had tasted the pleasure of presiding over a select circle, and receiving homage of a crowd of eminent and distinguished men. She had been a critic of art and literature, and even tried to set down her reminiscences on paper. After a life of petty intrigues, and worldly vanities, she retreated to the solitude and meditation of the Abbaye-aux-Bois.

Madame Récamier did not propose to live in a cloistered hermitage, but rather to follow the example of Madame de Montespan, when that lady retired to Saint-Joseph, and was visited by the whole court. It was said that her greatest privation was closing her stables. The loss of her horses was a definite sacrifice, but, on the whole, her sufferings were less than they were generally believed to be. Once in the Abbaye she seldom left it. And there were plenty of cabs in the streets.

Her rooms were very simple. Chateaubriand describes them. "A gloomy corridor separated two little rooms. . . . The bedroom contained a bookcase, a harp, a piano, a portrait of Madame de Staël, and a view of Coppet in moonlight. On the window-sills were pots of flowers. When,

panting after having climbed three flights of stairs, I entered the cell at twilight, I was delighted. The windows looked out upon the gardens of the Abbaye. Amidst the green verdure nuns walked, and schoolgirls ran to and fro. The branches of an acacia waved gently, whilst above, some belfries stood out sharply against the sky, and on the horizon could be seen the hills of Sèvres. The sinking sun gilded the picture, and cast its rays into the open windows. Birds slept on the sun-blinds. Across the tumult and the noise of a great city I had reached silence and solitude." [1]

This is the picture of a poet and a lover. Chateaubriand had too fine a soul to abandon a friend whom fortune had ill-treated. He followed her to the Abbaye-aux-Bois. Monsieur de Montmorency had been too well-educated to do otherwise. In continuing his assiduous attendance this fervent Christian had a hidden thought. He believed that life in a convent, the proximity of the chapel, the sight of the nuns, the tolling of the bells, would induce Madame Récamier to employ herself in religious exercises. A worldly soul could not fail to be impressed, and he was anxious for her salvation.

Ballanche formed one of the pieces of furniture in Madame Récamier's rooms. He was the general factotum of her house, charging himself with the execution of her commissions, and opening the door when the servants were away. In the latter confidential capacity he was often supplanted by the Marquis de Catellan.[2] He was unable to continue living in the Rue Lafitte after his patroness had emigrated to the left bank of the river. He installed himself at No. 21 Rue de Sèvres, almost opposite the Abbaye-aux-Bois. His love for Madame Récamier was a veritable folly, but a very sweet folly. He could not utter a sentence without

[1] *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 473. The Duchesse d'Abrantès, for some time a resident in the Abbaye-aux-Bois, has given a long description of the convent in her *Histoire des Salons de Paris*.

[2] " A fool like the noble peer, who opens your door." Chateaubriand to Madame Récamier, Berlin, April 14, 1821. *Souvenirs et correspondance*, Vol. I., p. 370.

speaking of her, and his conversation always opened with a litany to the adored one. In his room he had ten or twelve portraits of Madame Récamier. They were placed against the walls, on the tables, on the chairs, everywhere. And he only left his dear portraits in order to continue the conversation with their model.[1] Quickly he took to his old habits and his old armchair, almost without questioning the great change of fortune which had overwhelmed the woman he loved. Every morning, before he moved, he could be watched leaving his lodging in the Rue Lafitte, "clothed in black with a white cravate." He walked on foot to the Café Tortoni, and made a frugal *déjeuner* whilst ruminating over his *Palingénésie*. Then he climbed into an omnibus which conducted him to the Rue de Sèvres and the Abbaye-aux-Bois. There he passed the whole of the day. Chateaubriand arrived. Madame Récamier, seconded by her two acolytes—Ballanche, who was no longer jealous, and the Vicomte d'Arlincourt—recited her litanies to the glory of the author of the *Génie du christianisme*. Chateaubriand received their acts of worship from a sofa, without astonishment, and in complete detachment.

Following the example of Chateaubriand and Mathieu de Montmorency, many of the old familiars went to the Abbaye-aux-Bois, some through interest, others through curiosity or simply out of good manners. To them succeeded the men and women who are always anxious to follow the lead of the rest of the world. There was even an emulation not to forget her, and it became a point of honour to visit the Abbaye. Madame Récamier knew that her ruin was much spoken of, and that she was admired for her greatness of soul, her heroism, her abnegation. Words could not be found sufficiently strong to celebrate the splendid heroism

[1] I owe these details to Madame Michelet. She told me that Madame Récamier was very cold, even glacial. One day Lamartine wished to take Michelet to the Abbaye-aux-Bois, but the historian refused to go. The false atmosphere, lacking a natural simplicity and entirely conventional, was repugnant to him. According to what Madame Michelet said to me he did not believe in the legend of the "Saint's" absolute virtue.

of cutting down the size of one's establishment. The beautiful recluse was well aware of all the gossip.[1] Delighted to know that her salon had not been ruined, that fashion had decided that the Abbaye must be visited, she assumed a definite attitude before her contemporaries and posterity.

There were other salons presided over by women in Paris at this time, and more exclusively occupied with literature. Very notable was Madame Sophie Gay's circle, where the mistress of the house commenced to be jealous of her daughter's success. For the gracious fair-haired Delphine had more wit than her mother, wrote better, manipulated rhymes as easily as prose, and pushed her competition to such a pitch that she was even younger than her mother. Another salon was that presided over by Madame Auger, the wife of the Academician, where the attraction was a mordant and satirical wit. In the Comtesse de Lacretelle's drawing-room the guests spoke chiefly of the past and venerated the memory of Madame de Staël.[2] At the Comtesse Baraguey-d'Hilliers the company included many military writers. From these salons politics were almost banished, the chief subjects of conversation being new books and plays. Verses were recited, and tragedies, which never emerged from manuscript, were read and sometimes played. They even attacked the gravest history, and more than once read those fragments which to-day we call "studies." But, above all, they were interested in that *genre* of literary work known as "portraits." Every man who visited these salons had in his portfolio two or three portraits, which he was ready to read on the slightest provocation. In Madame Récamier's drawing-room readings were held, and verse was recited. Everything, however, was subordinated to the disposition of Chateaubriand, who, capricious as a woman, reigned like a despot.

Early each morning he sent a letter to Madame Récamier.

[1] De Barante. *Souvenirs*, Vol. II., p. 394. "I also go, when I am able, to the Abbaye, to see this poor Madame Récamier, who has much ennui at the unhappiness of her position. She supports it with nobility and simplicity, but she knows it well."

[2] Lacretelle. *Dix années d'épreuves.*

After breakfast he appeared "gaitered, buttoned up, cane in hand, head upright, and hand in the vest." Philarète Chasles, who drew this portrait, forgot the rose in his buttonhole, but it was always there. Chateaubriand arrived, exact as a clock, at three in the afternoon. He came to take the dose of adoration which was indispensable to the maintenance of his colossal self-conceit.

Madame Récamier awaited him with a vain impatience, which made him believe that his heart was touched. She beamed with that joy the Canticles tell us was displayed by the wife when she heard the voice of her spouse. She did not spare the incense. At the end of an hour, he took his cane and his hat and left to follow the same treatment at Madame de Boigne's. Her caustic wit was an amusing change from the conventionalities of the Abbaye. From Madame de Boigne he went to the Duchesse de Duras. Her manner was slightly lachrymose, and commenced to weary him.

With Madame Récamier, Chateaubriand had become a habit and nothing else. Affection was grafted on later. He had tried once, perhaps many times, to persuade her to descend from the higher ether in which she pretended to float, but he had not insisted very strongly. Like the hero in Madame de Duras' novel, *Oliver*, Chateaubriand was almost incapable of snatching an advantage from the feebleness of women.[1] He loved without endangering virtue.[2] Courtesy however made him pretend to give a grand value to favours which would have greatly embarrassed him had they ever been actually offered. Madame Récamier doubtless answered him in the words Madame du Deffand addressed to Horace Walpole. "Dear friend, all men are fools, and even those we believe to be wisest have their weak spots like the others." This is not a phrase to flatter an illustrious admirer. Madame Récamier was probably worried, and it is difficult to understand how she extracted herself from the adventure. We may guess that he had no more success

[1] Duc de Raguse. *Mémoirs*, Vol. VII., p. 208. *Journal de Cuvillier-Fleury*, Vol. I., p. 38.
[2] Philarète Chasles. *Mémoirs*, Vol. I., p. 182.

than any of his predecessors. Madame Récamier had for him all the passion of which she was capable—which was not much. She avowed that he "troubled" [1] her soul.

In spite of his all-conquering air, his captivating manner, and of the flower in his buttonhole, Chateaubriand grew bored. Madame Récamier was at her wits' end to distract the sombre Réné. For this noble Breton gentleman was not always tractable. The Duc Victor de Broglie refers to his humour in his "Souvenirs." "We have seen him in his days of adversity and decadence, arrogant and disdainful, complaisantly parading a personality, frank to cynicism, with an envious vanity, bitter and morose." The Duc de Broglie interprets his character severely, for his mannerisms were chiefly due to financial embarrassments. When Chateaubriand was seized with this fit of melancholy Madame Récamier invited a young girl to assist her to distract the great man. Miss Mary Clarke was an English girl who lived with her mother in the Abbaye-aux-Bois. She had almost the appearance of a boy, and her face was far from uncomely. On friendly terms with Monsieur Faurel, who was extremely ugly, she always had an inclination towards men of science. She was a combination of squirrel, kitten, and bird for liveliness, gaiety, and talkativeness. "Mary's presence was an antidote to Chateaubriand's gloom. She laughed at everybody. Sometimes she displeased, often she exasperated. But she never wearied." [2] It can be imagined

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. II., p. 101.

[2] K. O'Meara. *Un salon à Paris : Madame Mohl et ses Intimes*, p. 22.

Miss Mary Clarke (1793-1883), was of mixed Irish and Scottish parentage. Her widowed mother lived in rooms adjoining those of Madame Récamier at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, but moved into the Rue du Bac in 1838. For eighteen years Mary Clarke daily visited Madame Récamier. In 1847 she married Julius Mohl, the orientalist, who had previously lived with Ampère. Her own salon was celebrated for more than forty years, and many entertaining stories are told of her sharp tongue and most conventional manners. "This accomplished but slovenly lady," says one historian, "used to put up her hair in papers of divers colours—scraps of circulars, notes, newspapers—and if a casual visitor called before they were removed, would present herself as composedly as possible, with her head

what an aid she was to Madame Récamier in chasing away black thoughts. She accomplished this feat, writes O'Meara, with such success, that she became the favourite of the mistress of the house, and was definitely adopted by the brilliant circle. After the first triumph the arrival of Miss Clarke was awaited at the Abbey with more or less impatience, according to Chateaubriand's mood. When he caressed Madame Récamier's cat all eyes were turned to the door. As the crisis approached, he commenced to play with the bell-pull. The anxiety became overwhelming. The entry of the young English girl was saluted by a general gasp of relief. The feeling can be easily explained. The whole atmosphere was affected, and the slightest sign of light-hearted frolic and naturalism produced a magical effect upon the entire circle, as well as on the enervated Chateaubriand.

It is certain that Chateaubriand gave Madame Récamier much cause for jealousy. When he was ambassador at London, she sulked. He wrote to her wittily on July 12, 1822. "I prefer to learn your foolishness than to read mysterious and angry letters. I guess where I only thought. The answer is apparently the woman who has been mentioned to you by the Queen of Sweden's friend. But, tell me, have I the means of hindering Vernet? Mademoiselle Levert, who has written me some declarations, and thirty artists, women and men, come to England to gain money. If I were guilty, do you think that such fantasies would do you the slightest injury, or deprive you of what has never been given? You have been told a thousand lies. I recognise the work of some fine friends.[1] Calm yourself. The lady has gone, and will never return to England.

suggestive of that of the Medusa with its snakes, while a skirt of one colour and a jacket of another made up her costume." Amongst her English visitors were Dean Stanley (who first met his future wife, Lady Augusta Bruce, in her rooms), Mrs. Gaskell, who wrote "Wives and Daughters" in her drawing-room, George Eliot, and Thackeray with his daughters. Chateaubriand died in the same house, No. 120, Rue du Bac, which is still standing.

[1] Chiefly Mathieu de Montmorency. Chateaubriand had quickly discovered his jealousy.

Perhaps you wish that I should remain here on account of that ? " [1]

If Madame Récamier was jealous of Chateaubriand, other women were jealous of Madame Récamier. The Breton, who knew how he was being served in Paris by Mathieu de Montmorency and his cousin, Adrien, Duc de Laval, wrote to her : " I beg you to be a little discreet with Adrien. You have no idea of the letters Madame de Duras writes me." Adrien was trying to excite Madame Récamier's jealousy of Chateaubriand, and then told the same tales to the Duchesse de Duras, who was also deeply attached to the poet.

Although Madame Récamier called herself a recluse, she sometimes went out in the evening, and especially to the theatre. As her salon had certain literary pretensions the Comédie Française naturally had her preferences. She did not wish the last public appearances of Talma to pass without attending to applaud the great tragedian she had so often received. A new star was rising which threatened to eclipse the brilliance of all the most celebrated tragic actresses of her time.[2] Rachel was making a sensation on the stage. Going one evening under the escort of her usual cavalier, Ballanche, to Madame Ancelot's, Madame Récamier met the new celebrity. The young actress knew nothing of the history of the sad, white-robed woman, with the cold, frigid smile. Madame Ancelot took her apart, and told her that the visitor was Madame Récamier. Rachel had not even heard the name, but she paid due respect, and showed many small

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 425.

[2] Elisa Rachel (1821-1858), the greatest tragic actress of the French theatre, was the daughter of an Alsatian huckster. Her first success was at the Théatre Français in 1838. Her character was far from perfect, and she was extremely avaricious. Villemessant says that if she lost a few pence at cards she was furious, and quitted the table abusing everybody. Gronow describes her as extremely well-mannered, " wearing a high gown to conceal her extreme slimness, with a beautifully shaped head only adorned by her black waving hair. Her eyes were deeply set, and too black to be pleasing ; her regular profile and very long narrow face showed evident signs of her Jewish origin."

attentions. The result was an invitation to the Abbaye-aux-Bois.

The young artiste asked for nothing better. She enchanted every one with her airs of chastity and mystical purity, which rivalled those of the " angel " of the Abbaye. She received the most flattering applause for her marvellous recitation of Racine's and Corneille's verse. In the midst of the rolling lines allotted to Pauline in *Polyeucte*, the door was opened, and a footman announced the Archbishop of ——. The position was difficult, but Madame Récamier was aware that a little air of embarrassment would be sufficient to extricate her from the worst entanglement. She blushed timidly like a schoolgirl. It was her common practice.

" Monseigneur, I present to you Mademoiselle Rachel, who is good enough to recite to us a scene from *Polyeucte*."

The prelate begged Rachel to continue. She agreed with much grace, but would not repeat the character of Pauline in front of the priest, for she herself was an Israelite. With delicacy she substituted a scene from *Esther*. The whole room was fascinated, and Madame Récamier was delighted at the success of her gathering.

Madame Lenormant, with a truly middle-class and puerile vanity, joyfully enumerates the names of all the guests, foreigners as well as French, who crowded to the Abbaye-aux-Bois to pay " the tribute of their fidelity." She cites complaisantly, " the Duchess of Devonshire ; her brother the Earl of Bristol ; the Duke of Hamilton, who had welcomed the beautiful traveller with chivalric warmth in 1802, when he was still the Marquis of Douglas ; Lady Davy, and her illustrious husband, Sir Humphry Davy, with whom she had climbed Vesuvius ; Maria Edgworth ; Alexander von Humboldt ; without counting all those distinguished and celebrated recruits, of every party and every station, which society adds to its ranks year by year. Monsieur de Kératry, Monsieur Dubois, of the *Globe*, Eugène Delacroix, David d'Angers, Augustin Périer, Bertin the elder, were to be found with Chateaubriand and Benjamin

Constant, as later were to be seen Villemain, the Comte de Montalembert, Alexis de Tocqueville, Baron Pasquier, de Salvandy, Augustin Thierry, Henri de la Touche, Sainte-Beuve, and Merimée."[1] This mixture of names could be pardoned with a smile if it had been printed once, but it is repeated too often in Madame Lenormant's book. Was the merit of Madame Récamier only to be found in the celebrity of her friends? Miss Clarke, who became later Madame Mohl, judged Madame Lenormant's feeble vanity with much common-sense. "This flaunting of dukes and princes reminds me of those men who stick the cards of their titled acquaintances in their glass, and throw the others behind the fire."[2]

On January 1, 1820, Monsieur Ampère, who, like his old friend Ballanche, came from Lyons, presented his son Jean Jacques to Madame Récamier.

He was a most sympathetic young man. His age was twenty-one, his features doll-like and beardless, but he had the heart of a poet, and the soul of a child. Hitherto his life had been somewhat neglected. Hardly had he left the cradle when his mother died, a woman who was capable of understanding, appreciating, and directing his entry into the larger world. His father, a man of genius and a scientist of the first rank, was as simple as a child in the ordinary business of life. Incapable of giving any practical advice to his son, he was ready to let him go his own way. Despite his school the boy did well; despite his teachers, he retained a taste for study and work. There are some happy natures which resist all temptations. Fantastical and eccentric, loathing the discipline of the schools, he did little in order. His father was very wise, but knew nothing about youth. He was a great observer of nature, but he never dreamed of studying his son, of developing to a supreme perfection his happy disposition.

J. J. Ampère had imagination, originality, much intelli-

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 327.
[2] O'Meara. *Un salon à Paris. Madame Mohl et ses intimes*, p. 149.

gence, a tendency towards dreaming, a taste for rural wanderings, on the whole a very charming character. The effervescence of his twentieth year made others believe that he had been born a poet. He was the first to recognise that they were deceived. He realised the gaps in his education, and, working hard to repair them, quickly became one of the most erudite men of his time.

This did not prevent him from being one of the most amiable. Simple in his ways (like all superior beings), accustomed to the world by reason of his intimacy with the Jussieu family, timidity did not render him awkward. Contemporary accounts give a faithful portrait of his manners in the salons. He was lively, always ready to be of service, extremely amiable with every one he met, overflowing with original sallies, but always without malice, with an active common-sense which was picturesque and rich in colour. He loved the world, and went into it without stint. He did not hide his republican opinions, though he did not push them to the same extent as his father. "I have much affection for him," wrote the Comtesse de Boigne to Monsieur Pasquier, and later, "I always receive him with the greatest pleasure. He is a charming conversationalist, and his wit is bright and varied."[1]

Madame Récamier could not perceive all the merits of this young man on the day he was presented to her. Indeed, the poor boy was so dazzled by the startling beauty of a woman whose reputation was universal, the impression was so strong, that he remained mute. With her usual good will towards every newcomer, and flattered at the visible effect she produced upon the youth, Madame Récamier addressed some gracious words to him which added to his embarrassment. At last he recovered his self-possession, and was able to answer the enchantress' benevolent questions. In order to assume an appearance of ease, he picked up from a side-table a red marble knife, a valuable souvenir of the Italian journey. To escape the embarrassment which tormented him, he nervously twisted it between his

[1] Louis Favre. *Etienne-Denis Pasquier*, p. 342.

fingers. Suddenly the marble broke. The poor Jean Jacques looked with despair at the pieces. Had the earth opened and swallowed him up it would have been a relief. Madame Récamier calmed him with an amiable smile, dropped the pieces of the precious knife behind a cushion, and continued the conversation as peacefully as if nothing had happened. The young man never forgot the simple act, and declared his hostess as good as she was beautiful.

The death of his mother had robbed J. J. Ampère of a guardian angel during his infancy, but he found one at the Abbaye-aux-Bois. For an instant he even thought he had discovered something better. Sainte-Beuve, who much appreciated his fine and original character, tells us the story, which is charming in its naïveté and youthful grace. "During the summer or the autumn which followed this introduction, Madame Récamier stayed at the Vallée-aux-Loups. Ampère was there also for some weeks in the company of his friend De Jussieu, who had a small property in the neighbourhood. During this period of idleness and happiness, his imagination was captured by the charms of his chosen companion. She was still distinguished by a slowly declining, but yet divine beauty. Ampère returned to Paris about a fortnight before Madame Récamier. As soon as he knew of her arrival, he called upon her at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, and he found her alone. With her usual grace, she spoke to him of the charming holiday, the rides and walks across the dales, the gay conversations. Then, touching with art skilfully the fibres of his heart, she slightly indicated that his feelings had been perhaps agitated, and that if the holiday had been prolonged, she might have had cause to fear the beginning of a romance. Her niece, then quite young, had been with her. At these words, Ampère could no longer restrain himself. Suddenly, with a burst of sobs, he cried: "Ah! It was not for her." He fell on his knees. His declaration was made, his secret had escaped him. He had unintentionally spoken the sacred word from which he could never draw back. Henceforward it was the destiny of his life. Madame Récamier

had but to continue to charm him little by little, without ever curing him.

She tried to calm the poor youth, but it would have been better if she had not commenced by allowing his heart to languish. Ampère joined Lucien Bonaparte, Ballanche, Benjamin Constant, Chateaubriand, and the others. In spite of her forty-three years, Madame Récamier had been amusing herself, and again trying the effect of her smiles! At forty-three she did not look more than thirty, and the woman of thirty is always dangerous. It is open to doubt if a young man of twenty, such as the younger Ampère, would have dared to fall at the feet of Madame Récamier if he had not received some encouragement.[1] Her reputation was European, and her beauty imposing. Jean Jacques Ampère had been fascinated by it, as Jean Jacques Rousseau had been by Madame d'Houdetot, who, it must be said in parenthesis, was far from beautiful.

The young Ampère did not wish to be cured. The soft dressings that the siren placed upon his cherished wounds were applied less to heal them than to keep them always open. Madame Récamier did not seriously endeavour to cure the unfortunate child. He agreed with her fantastic wish to change his name from Jean Jacques to Edward. Jean Jacques was the name of Rousseau, a rustic, a revolutionary, who was not at all *comme il faut*. On the other hand Edward was a name fit for a well-mannered young man. Even Jean Jacques Rousseau would have admitted this, for in his *Nouvelle Héloise* by the side of the sweet name of Julie he placed the amiably romantic Lord Edward.

With docility the poor lover threw aside the name his father had given him, and assumed that of Edward. The

[1] Ten years later the impression was still fresh. Ampère wrote to Madame Récamier, December 27, 1829: "It was on New Year's Day that you suddenly appeared to me for the first time, in a white robe, with a grace of which I had previously no idea. I shall never forget that moment. All my youth has passed between it and the moment that I am now writing to you. During the interval I have always found you, whether in joy or pain, still with the charm of our first meeting." (André-Marie Ampère et Jean Jacques Ampère. *Correspondance et souvenirs*, Vol. II., p. 10.)

son of the great Ampère was Edward to all his friends. Ballanche addressed him as " my dear Edward."

Love sometimes makes the most intelligent persons absurd, and Madame Récamier, so calm and self-possessed, not content with having changed the Christian name of young Ampère, wished to change her own name. It was very simple, she had but to change husbands.

She was so delighted at this name of Edward, and even more so over the person she had baptised, that she forgot many things she ought to have remembered, and ended by favourably receiving the tender declarations her attitude had provoked. Again she thought of divorcing her husband, now almost an octogenarian, in order to marry the youth. Seventeen years earlier she had dreamed of the same remedy so that she might marry Prince Augustus of Prussia. Now she could have been Edward's mother. But love is blind, and Madame de Staël, who found happiness in her last attempt at conjugal life, had given an example for such disproportionate matches. She was over fifty when she married Lieutenant Rocca, who was twenty-three.

We must remember that Madame Récamier's beauty was essentially cold. She was not able to excite a lasting passion. Love soon changed into friendship. Her beauty attracted attention, but love, in her case, was not born of beauty alone. That was only the decoy. Her affectations and coquetries did the rest. When her admirers found that she behaved to others in exactly the same manner, and that she had no wish to give herself to one, they finished by accommodating themselves to the situation, and accepting the friendship she offered. Thus she extinguished the passions to which she had given birth. Friendship with her was a mark of fashion. Her circle was distinguished, and useful to frequent.

Ninon de l'Enclos, who had not the same reasons as Madame Récamier to act so cruelly, and who was far from enjoying the double temperament of a prude and a coquette, also presided over a drawing-room of men. But it was her wit which retained them when they could not command her complaisance. Apart from the easy gallantries of

Ninon, there are many points of resemblance between her and Madame Récamier. "Ninon," wrote Saint-Simon, "had illustrious friends of every kind, and so much wit that she kept them all united even amongst themselves, or at least without scandal." And the Duke goes on to explain that it became the mode to frequent her rooms, for the society she kept was of value to a rising man. She forbade gaming, noisy jokes, quarrelling, and the discussion of religion or politics. The conversation was sparkling, and she attracted her friends even when she had lost her physical charms. She was disinterested, faithful, discreet, and absolutely reliable.

Faithful and a good friend, Madame Récamier could certainly be called. But had she any other merit? Her conversation could not be compared with that of either Ninon or Madame de Staël. She had not their gifts. She mixed in the general conversation, but she did not direct it. Now and again she interjected a sentence, but it was always a word of approbation. She discreetly whispered into each ear how much she admired the most insignificant remarks her friend had made. She flattered every vanity, and was careful not to wound a single susceptibility. Naturally she was proclaimed the most amiable and the best of women, just as she had been glorified as the most beautiful.

She permitted no unseemliness in her salon. If the conversation became too high-pitched, if she heard a word which maligned a personality, or tampered with religion or politics, she assumed a soft indignation, complained of the intolerance and wickedness of men, and asked that their licence might not be extended to the future. Thus she pleased everybody. Sainte-Beuve recognised the inconveniences of so benevolent a system. "It was certainly a salon where not only politeness but charity slightly overcast the truth." [1]

In showing herself charitably disposed towards others, Madame Récamier was at the same time charitable towards herself, and so guarded her own reputation. Madame

[1] Sainte-Beuve: *Causeries du lundi*, Vol. II., p. 136.

Geoffrin directed and guided the conversation—I might write, the debates—in her salon. Her drawing-room became almost a deliberative assembly. She shepherded her visitors like a sheep-dog, and when they became unruly was ready to bite them. Madame Récamier's supreme cleverness was to attract the most distinguished men as admirers. She favoured them and wished to cage them in her menagerie. They came, and formed her circle. In this manner, thanks to her illustrious friendships, her salon became a centre of influence as strongly political as literary. For the birth of her real salon dates from the Abbaye-aux-Bois. She could no longer receive in the beautiful rooms of her great mansions, but only in a simple chamber, paved in brick, covered by a poor carpet, and adorned with the most modest furniture. She was able to say that her friends came for her, and not for her fortune. She deceived herself if she believed it. Her old friends followed her to the Abbaye, out of kindly tact and for their own convenience. They did not wish to desert the woman fortune had abandoned so suddenly. They had the habit of gathering together under her roof, and they returned to it as they would return to a club. But the younger men only came to meet the older members of the circle, of whom they stood in need. Both classes were always and equally well received. The salon of the Abbaye was not, however, open to all who wished to enter. To obtain this favour the visitor had to be a person of some personal distinction. This selection added to the honour. The men were ready to follow Chateaubriand and the Montmorencys. The women were only invited, when they could serve the hostess's more or less direct interest, as in the case of Rachel.

Delphine Gay [1] was another example of this latter method.

[1] Delphine Gay (1805-1855) was a beautiful woman in an age of beautiful women. "Madame de Girardin," writes Théophile Gautier, "was then in all the pride of her beauty. The face, which, when a young girl, too much resembled a carving in marble, suited admirably the woman with her fine figure and statuesque pose. . . Her suite of rooms was hung with woollen damask, the colour of sea-green. She received her friends in her bedroom, the bed shrouded

DELPHINE GAY
(MADAME EMILE DE GIRARDIN)
*After a contemporary lithograph*

The fair young girl had already received many flatteries from the Duchesse de Duras and the Duchesse de Maillé for the admirable manner in which she recited her poetry. Chateaubriand had spoken of her at the Abbaye with eulogy. Madame Récamier did not fear the child as a rival, and seeing that she was the pet of duchesses, she remembered that her mother had once been a friend. So Delphine Gay was graciously invited. An evening was expressly allotted to hear her. It was the rage at that period to recite poetry. Mademoiselle Delphine consented with much good grace to repeat her lines. Her manner was enchanting. The poem dealt with two sisters who devotedly worked during an epidemic in Barcelona. The girl obtained a most brilliant success not only personally but also for her verse. The academicians present did not forget the child who had dared to attack so grave a subject, and the poem was crowned by the Académie Francaise. This time the spirit of gallantry found itself in accord with the spirit of justice and good sense.

from sight by curtains. Here came Victor Hugo, Balzac, Eugène Sue, Alphonse Karr, Alfred de Musset." Her husband, Emile de Girardin, was a busy political journalist with a reputation for uncertain temper. This is hardly surprising, for he rose at 5 a.m. in the winter, and an hour earlier in the summer.

## CHAPTER IX

THE death of the Duc de Berri on February 13, 1820, changed the aspect of home affairs under Louis XVIII. The ministry was reshuffled. Monsieur Decazes was dismissed, and Chateaubriand seemed designed for a portfolio. However Louis XVIII. had a violent antipathy against the poet, and it was necessary to give him an embassy. Mathieu de Montmorency received this idea with enthusiasm. His feelings were still hurt at the influence that the illustrious author of the *Génie du christianisme* exercised over Madame Récamier. The project of removing his rival from Paris for many months excited his jealous spirit, and he used every endeavour to bring it to a successful issue. Chateaubriand did not outwardly appear to concern himself with the matter in the slightest. "I ask for nothing," he wrote to Madame Récamier with proud modesty. "I solicit nothing." [1]

Mathieu looked forward with joy to the day when he would be free from the embarrassment of Chateaubriand's presence at the Abbaye-aux-Bois. He worked with a furious energy to secure the ambassadorial nomination. He wrote to Madame Récamier: "I think I can be sure of our success, amiable friend. I say 'our success,' for the person most interested ought to be touched at your interest in the matter."[2]

The most interested person was not in reality Chateaubriand, but Mathieu himself. The proof is that Chateaubriand never asked for the post, whereas Montmorency

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 343.
[2] *Souvenirs de correspondance de Madame Recamier*, Vol. I., p. 343.

actively interested Pasquier and the Duc de Richelieu. He believed all the while that he was working on behalf of Chateaubri and, whereas he was merely obeying the less praiseworthy instinct of jealousy. His zeal triumphed, and Chateaubriand was named ambassador to Berlin.

From Prussia he wrote frequently to Madame Récamier, who did not hurry to respond. Perhaps her reason was idleness, or a coquettish desire to awake a trifling irritation. But Chateaubriand was above this weakness. He had not been two weeks at Berlin, when he wrote: "Well, I know my business, and I can assure you it is very easy. I am acquainted with thirty imbeciles who would make excellent ambassadors." By an association of ideas the name of Mathieu de Montmorency came to his pen. "Remembrances and friendship to Mathieu. Madame de Chateaubriand complains that she sees none of our 'pretended' friends, the word is her own. Our friends are bad-mannered and ungrateful, but I will attend to it."[1]

The ministry played him tricks, and kept none of its promises. Chateaubriand wrote indignantly to Madame Récamier and fulminated against the government. Mathieu, who feared he might return, interviewed the ministers, and prevailed upon the cabinet to leave their ambassador at rest.

Chateaubriand wrote to her from Berlin: "Prince Augustus has shown me a sketch of a woman, called 'the Exile,' which has been made after your portrait. The features are not entirely yours, but there is sufficient resemblance to give me very sad reflections upon my own exile." Mathieu had still sadder thoughts at the idea that Chateaubriand might throw up his exile, and he tried to smooth away the difficulties between the ambassador and the ministry. But the Breton would make no concessions. "It is odd that Mathieu should speak of the humour which affects certain persons when I speak to them as such people should be spoken to. . . . My enemies are very ignoble, and my friends very feeble." He returned to the same subject in his next letter. "In truth, I could never have

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 353.

believed my friends to be so silly, or that they believed me to be so foolish." [1] At last, having obtained leave, he wrote to Madame Récamier: "Will Mathieu be very pleased to see me? I doubt it."

Mathieu was extremely upset when he suddenly learned that Chateaubriand was returning to Paris, and he allowed Madame Récamier to notice his ill-humour.

Under the Restoration there were many military plots. The conspiracy of Saumur, so badly engineered by the unfortunate General Berton, came for trial in 1822. Amongst the first batch of prisoners were two quartermasters, Sirejean, belonging to the *chasseurs* of Ariège, and Coudert, of the *chasseurs* of the Var. These young men created much interest. The commander of the school of cavalry, General Gentil Saint-Alphonse, was called as a witness, and testified to their good conduct. The Marquis de Castries, colonel of the regiment in which Sirejean served, also bore testimony to the excellent qualities of his non-commissioned officer. The same character was given to Coudert. In spite of all, they were condemned to death. The judges were pitiless. The conspirators had plotted to dethrone the Bourbons, to proclaim the King of Rome as Emperor, under the title of Napoleon II., and to establish a regency, under the constitution of 1791, consisting of Lafayette, Benjamin Constant, and Lafitte.

Sirejean and Coudert appealed. Their families attempted to conciliate the King, and gain the goodwill of the public. Coudert's brother sought the intervention of Madame Récamier, who, through her relationship with the higher powers, might be able to exercise a favourable influence. He went to her without loss of time, excited her pity, and obtained the promise of her assistance. It must at once be admitted that Madame Récamier's conduct deserves all praise. As with the poor fisherman of Albano, she again revealed a sympathetic heart and a true benevolence. She turned to all her friends, and demanded their interest on behalf of the accused. She begged Mathieu de Mont-

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 364

morency to help her, and brought Coudert's brother to him. Mathieu, however, was not deeply moved. Maybe he was still irritated against the woman who had given the first place in her affections to Chateaubriand. It is quite probable that he was pleased to tell Madame Récamier that a man of his importance could not be flouted with impunity. Montmorency revealed a poverty of soul which is not to his honour. The Duc de Broglie has left some account of this affair. " Madame Récamier told me that she found Mathieu very insensible to her appeal. He did not listen to her reasons, and kept his emotions under restraint. A mixture of levity and devotion made his resolution foolish but immovable."[1] This man, who did not wish to understand, set aside his Christian charity, although he believed himself to be a better Christian than the majority of the world. Distressed at the attitude of a politician who could have obtained all she desired, Madame Récamier addressed herself to the Duc de Doudeauville. She found him absolutely stupid. Then she tried to interest her other friends in the case of the wretched Coudert. The Duc de Broglie wrote a very pressing letter to Madame de Duras. Her husband, the Duc de Duras, was the first gentleman in attendance on the King. Monsieur de Marcellus was ready to speak to the King, but he had to relinquish the project when he was told that the sovereign had already responded to such solicitations with much severity. Monsieur de Castellane tried again with Mathieu, who listened to his remarks, " with distraction and mirth." Madame Récamier, he said, was very wrong to bring the brother to him. Why should such a man be more interesting to him than any other ? However, Benjamin Constant promised Coudert's brother his support, and Madame Récamier's zeal became still more active. When these efforts became known Chateaubriand did not hide from Madame de Castellane his opinion that a mistake had been made. In approaching Benjamin Constant, Coudert's brother had invited Liberal support, enough to spoil any attempt to save the prisoner's life.

[1] Duc de Broglie. *Souvenirs*, Vol. II., p. 271.

Benjamin had not written to Madame Récamier for six years, but over this business he broke his long silence. "It seems to me that if you speak to Monsieur de Montmorency you will be able to save the young man. Monsieur de Montmorency was also in great danger when he was arrested. I believe it was in Franche-Comté after the 18th Fructidor, and men of different political views from his, did not hesitate to do everything possible for his deliverance."[1] But Mathieu did not remember the incident.

Before a second court-martial at Tours, the two young men were condemned afresh. Sirejean was sentenced to death, Coudert to five years' imprisonment. For the last-named, Madame Récamier's efforts had been successful. He was declared guilty of concealment only.

The unhappy Sirejean had nothing to expect. He aroused every sympathy. His youth, his frank face, the praise his officers gave him, and the dignity of his bearing, touched every heart. The ladies of Tours sent flowers and other presents to his prison. Resolved to do all they could to save him, they addressed themselves to Madame Récamier. Her friendly relationship with Monsieur de Montmorency, the minister of state for foreign affairs, was well known. She was begged to obtain a pardon from the King.[2] Sirejean's family at the same time implored her to use her influence, and his aunt implored her pity and sympathetic help.

Madame Récamier was as active for Sirejean as for Coudert. This time, Monsieur de Montmorency deigned to approach one of the officers of state, but not the King. His conduct was unworthy of his pretensions. His piety should have recalled to his mind the words of the Marquise de Créqui, that true religion consists less of what we think than of what we do. Humanity is the first duty. The wretched Sirejean joined the poor fisherman of Albano,

[1] *Lettres de Benjamin Constant à Madame Récamier*, p. 311.

[2] Chateaubriand in his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* cites the *Histoire des salons de Paris*, by the Duchesse d'Abrantès, in connection with this affair. It contains many inexactitudes.

both victims of the barbarity of sovereigns and their ministers.

For long after Madame Récamier suffered from the failure of her attempt to save the life of a fellow human being.[1]

The story of her intervention spread through France. The following year a new military plot was discovered, and a crowd of unfortunate prisoners stood before a court-martial. A retired lieutenant-colonel, Caron, was shot at Strasburg, and a former lieutenant named Roger was condemned to death. Benjamin Constant wrote to Madame Récamier: "I could not forgive myself, madame, if I importuned you incessantly. But the fault is not mine, for there are death sentences without end. The bearer of this letter is brother to the unhappy Roger, condemned with Caron. It is an odious history, and the facts are well-known. Monsieur de Chateaubriand will recognise the name. He is fortunate enough to be at one and the same time the chief power of the ministry, and the only minister under whose rule no blood has been shed. I add nothing, but what your heart can guess. It is very sad that I seldom write to you except upon such dolorous affairs. But I know you will pardon me, and I believe you will add one more unhappy name to the list of those you have saved."[2]

Madame Récamier gained the aid of Chateaubriand in her work of humanity, and, to her great joy, succeeded. The King remitted the death sentence, and the former lieutenant had to suffer public exhibition at Metz, and twenty years' penal servitude.[3] Benjamin Constant pre-

[1] She showed her chagrin to Chateaubriand, who was then ambassador in London. He replied: "I find—don't be angry with me—that the pleasure of having saved Coudert ought to reconcile you to the fate of Sirejean." A few days later: "I am truly sorry to find that you are so upset at the death of this unfortunate young man as to forget all your friends." *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., pp. 394-395.

[2] *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 471. Chateaubriand must have felt a very legitimate pride at this assertion that he was the single minister with no blood on his hands.

[3] See on this subject, *Les complots militaires sous la Restauration*, by E. Guillon, p. 173.

sented Roger's brother to Madame Récamier. Chateaubriand endeavoured to spare the prisoner his committal to the hulks at Toulon, but it was not until two years later that he obtained his pardon. In the *Mémoires* he chronicles the epilogue. " When the captain [1] was set at liberty, he wished to thank his benefactors. According to my habit, I was with Madame Récamier after dinner. Suddenly this officer appeared. He spoke to us with the accent of the Midi. ' Without your intercession my head would have rolled across the scaffold.' We were stupefied, for we had forgotten our own merit in the matter. He cried, red as a turkey cock : ' Don't you remember ? ' Vainly we made a thousand excuses for our forgetfulness. He went away, the spurs on his boots ringing, as furious that we had forgotten our good action as if he had come to reproach us for his death."[2]

Madame Récamier's powerful influence was as well known as her goodwill. She was not only asked to save lives, but her support was begged for less important affairs. Her benevolence was inexhaustible, and it is curious to note that amongst the many who came to solicit her assistance were members of the Bonaparte family.

She had however some enemies—women rather than men. The famous Madame Hamelin never pardoned Monsieur de Montrond's predilection. So, when Madame Recamier's name occurred in conversation, she did not lose the opportunity of letting fall a malicious remark.

Madame Récamier's friends daily gained in influence. The ministerial combination of December 15, 1821, allotted the portfolio of foreign affairs to Mathieu de Montmorency, and, three months later, Chateaubriand was nominated ambassador to London. In spite of the pleasure this appointment gave him, he was annoyed to find that his " friend " Mathieu now became his immediate chief. However he was happy to re-enter his old sphere of activity.

[1] Chateaubriand was wrong. Roger had never been other than a lieutenant.

[2] Chateaubriand. *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. IV., p. 471.

Idleness, or rather his estrangement from politics, weighed heavily upon him, for, during the previous year, when his friends De Villèle and Corbière retired from the cabinet, he had rather angrily resigned his post as ambassador at Berlin. He arrived in London during April, 1822, and found a larger theatre for the parade of his talents, although his little vanities slightly detracted from the proud effect. His feelings towards Madame Récamier did not change. He wrote to her often, and gave many of his impressions, in his brilliant position of envoy, about a city where—thirty years earlier—wretched and forgotten, he had almost died of hunger.

Thus the correspondence between London and the Abbaye-aux-Bois was active, although Madame Récamier was irregular in her replies. Chateaubriand gently complained. If he was not always pleased with her, he was always pleased with himself. "Politically speaking, I begin to succeed in this country. I am doing much good for our friends. I begin to succeed in politics. . . . I have given to our diplomacy a character more in keeping with the proud name of France which I uphold. . . . The King received me marvellously well. . . . Whilst I arrange the affairs of the royalists outside, they are all upset inside. . . . People are behaving very well to me here. . . . I should like my friends at Paris to appreciate a little the price of my services." Chateaubriand did not hide his conviction that he spent his time in repairing the stupidities of the home government, and that France would be lost were he not on the spot. He added that he had made his peace with Mathieu. There were reasons for this, but the peace was never sincere.

Indeed, a month after, when a conference at Verona was in contemplation,[1] Chateaubriand sent letter after letter to Madame Récamier, asking her to influence Mathieu, as

[1] The Congress of Verona was held from October to December, 1822, attended by the sovereigns of Austria, Prussia, Russia, the two Sicilies, and Sardinia. Great Britain was represented by the Duke of Wellington, and Metternich presided. The subjects of

minister of foreign affairs, to appoint him the envoy. "This congress," said he, gallantly, "will have the immense advantage of bringing me back to Paris. All these politics signify nothing, I die of the need to see you." But, if he was dying of anything, it was the need of being seen, less by Madame Récamier than by the congress. He became gracious to Mathieu, and told Madame Récamier: "I have healed the wounds of his pride, as well as those of his heart." There were other wounds of a similar nature that Chateaubriand had to soothe, and they were to be found in the heart of Madame Récamier herself. She had learned (and perhaps Mathieu was no stranger to this malicious indiscretion) that, in London, Chateaubriand did not appear to have any clear idea of the fidelity he owed to the woman who had deigned to admit him to her friendship. His wife never entered into the question.

Madame Récamier complained bitterly. The ambassador replied that she quarrelled with him on one side, and Madame de Duras on the other. "I feel myself guilty. Recompense me with some soft words, admit your injustice, and the pain you make me suffer. Whilst I live, I live for you." [1]

In saying these words Chateaubriand was sincere. Monsieur de Marcellus, then first secretary to the French embassy in London, tells us that he had to search London for a *Romance* by Steibelt, entitled *La plus belle des belles*, and to play it on the piano to the ambassador during his solitary evenings. "This thought was homage to Madame Récamier." [2]

Through Madame Récamier Chateaubriand pressed his claims in Paris. He still wished to be an envoy at the congress. Mathieu delayed the question, week by week, for months, without arriving at any conclusion. Becoming exasperated, Chateaubriand accused the foreign minister of incapacity, believing that jealousy was at the bottom of

discussion were the disturbances in Spain and south-eastern Europe, and one result was the armed intervention of France in Spain in 1823.

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 427.

[2] De Marcellus. *Chateaubriand et son temps*, p. 328.

the trouble. He wrote to Madame Récamier that he would tender his resignation. "Better be nothing than serve men so little capable of judging events or appreciating their friends." Some days after, his irritation is still keen. "They do not want the kind of man I am," he wrote, with more frankness and foresight than modesty. "Mathieu and Villèle have equally deceived me. They will fall, to the applause of men of every opinion and every party. It may be jealousy, it may be confidence in their own strength, but they have failed to understand what I have done for them."

On the contrary, they understood it very well. They saw that Chateaubriand would not be contented until he occupied the first place, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mathieu had no wish to relinquish it in his favour. To be supplanted by him at Madame Récamier's was enough. Monsieur de Villèle did not trouble to support Montmorency in the cabinet, and Chateaubriand had succeeded in convincing the minister that he alone, by reason of his authority in the royalist party, was capable of fighting Mathieu and his scheme of Spanish intervention. Quite probably Monsieur de Villèle promised him the portfolio of foreign affairs upon the day when they could decently rid themselves of Monsieur de Montmorency.

At last, on September 3, the ambassador wrote to the Abbaye-aux-Bois: "the business is done, but with a very bad grace on the part of Mathieu." The foreign minister had not been blind to the machinations of his subordinate.

When Chateaubriand arrived in Paris, Mathieu had already left for Vienna, where, more devotee than diplomatist, he missed an interview with Metternich by going to visit a church and some convents. He then continued his journey to Verona, where Chateaubriand intended to join him after a short stay in Paris. Madame Récamier was spending a holiday at the Vallèe-aux-Loups, with her niece and Ballanche. She hurried to Paris to see her illustrious friend, who was not able to set his foot on his old estate. From this moment the correspondence of the two rivals is very

frequent, for, despite their courtesy, they were at daggers drawn. Mathieu hardly attempted to dissimulate his disdain and animosity. He would not even write the name of his detested friend. He wrote from Vienna to Madame Récamier: "You are returning (from the Vallèe-aux-Loups) to see the new arrival. It may be in the possible order of things that I shall spend fifteen days with him at Verona, against my own will, I can assure you. Personally, I do not know to what degree it will please him."

He knew very well that it would not please Chateaubriand at all. However he wrote to the ambassador "several very amiable letters," according to Chateaubriand's letter to Madame Récamier, and at Verona Chateaubriand was "very gracious," to quote Mathieu's letter of October 17. At the same time he explained to the common friend that he hoped this state of things would last, but he was unable to refrain from remarking that Chateaubriand was singularly gruff and surly: "I imagine that in the absence of a certain lady (Madame Récamier), he reserves all his gifts of fascination for the sovereigns who are so numerous here. I am curious to know what tales he will send to the Abbaye-aux-Bois; but you would not wish me to make use of the privileges of diplomacy in order to satisfy my curiosity. I hope to leave him in about a fortnight, so that he can exert himself alone, or at least with his two colleagues,[1] whilst I bring you the news. I have been compelled to ask him about you, although we do not often share this subject of conversation." "All that he wants to know," wrote Chateaubriand on his side, "is how I stand with your friend. We are very polite." In other words this meant that they were not on good terms. A week later the ice was gradually broken. Perhaps Madame Récamier had ordered them not to sulk. "We get on very well together," wrote Chateaubriand. "When he understood that I was good-humoured he pardoned the rest." Peace then reigned between the rivals, but an armed peace. The minister and

[1] Monsieur de Caraman and Monsieur de la Ferronays. In addition Chateaubriand had seven secretaries.

his ambassador confronted each other like two dogs, each one growling and ready to fly at the other's throat.

The congress was prolonged, and, on November 12, Mathieu wrote to Madame Récamier: "My understanding with the last arrival"—he did not wish to write the name of Chateaubriand—"remains good, and in all that concerns me, I must not complain. I have shown every confidence in him, and he has responded by such frank manners and conversation, that I have not the slightest suspicion that he is writing to you, or to any one else, in another sense. The act would be so false that I cannot believe him capable of doing it. But I do not like the general position he has taken up, the stiffness and savagery, which makes others ill at ease with him.[1] This complicates where he should endeavour to simplify. With regard to the rest, we speak little of you—it is our custom, as you know." [2]

There was something puerile in these two men, one was Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the other an ambassador. One was a Montmorency, and the other Chateaubriand. They carried their quarrels to a woman who led them both by the nose. They told her of their wisdom, and that they refrained from quarrelling because she had forbidden them.

At the close of the congress, contented with their efforts, they returned to Paris. Mathieu received the title of duke in recompense for his services, and Chateaubriand, who followed him from Verona after an interval of three weeks, received from Madame Récamier her most charming smiles.

However, Monsieur de Montmorency found himself in disagreement with the majority of the cabinet, so he resigned. Monsieur de Villèle, the president of the Council, wished to replace him by a man of importance amongst the royalists. He immediately thought of Chateaubriand. Chateaubriand's pride and jealousies were touched by the offer.

[1] Chateaubriand's relations with his colleagues were very strained. His début at the Congress was not brilliant, and his vanity had been wounded at his lack of success before an assembly of kings and diplomatists. In addition, owing to his late arrival, he passed almost unperceived. All this gave him a bad humour.

[2] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. I., p. 449.

He allowed Villèle to beg for a long while, and suggested a thousand reasons for not agreeing with the proposition. It was almost necessary to use violence to compel him to accept a position he was dying to assume.

Monsieur de Villèle was not long in regretting that he had the famous writer for a colleague. Madame Récamier had to exert every effort to maintain an appearance of courtesy between Mathieu and Chateaubriand. Monsieur de Montmorency was so irritated that he absolutely refused to pronounce his rival's name. When he referred to him in writing he employed a periphrase, or simply the word " he " underlined.

Chateaubriand was exuberantly happy. He troubled himself no more about Mathieu, treating that politician as if he had never existed. His letters are more gay, more witty, and more amiable than ever. Here is a scrap, written in the rush and hurry of his ministerial occupations. " June 6. Council again. Business will kill me, above all if I am much longer prevented from seeing you, but Monday will be the day of my deliverance. To-morrow, no matter if Europe goes to the bottom of the sea, I will see you. *A vous ! à vous !* " [1] However, he would have been very much annoyed if he had not been able to tell her that he was overwhelmed with work.

He sent her dozens of short notes, keeping her acquainted with the trend of events in Spain. He knew that this attention gave her the greatest pleasure, for she loved to be the first to announce the news to her visitors. This gave an importance to her salon which brought visitors. She had now become a coquette with no great confidence in what remained of her charm and beauty. She recognised that to retain and attract gallants she must create an attraction of wit, conversation, and a thousand artifices. This did not prevent trouble, from time to time, with her " beasts."

" To-morrow at eight o'clock," wrote Chateaubriand to her, " if you consent, I will come to the little cell, although you were very rude to me last time." What had happened ?

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. II., p. 22.

His grandeur mounting to his head, the minister had perhaps displayed fancies more loving than amicable. A difficulty may have arisen on account of Mathieu. Sainte-Beuve suggests " a little jealousy upon the subject of a very pretty and witty lady, Madame de C——, who was always welcomed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs." [1] There was a mixture of all these causes, but Chateaubriand, in his glory as minister, soon forgot Madame Récamier's severity. He wrote to her : " I am extremely tired, and twenty times a day I have the desire to rest near you." [2]

Madame Récamier was tormented at the ill-feeling which existed between her two great friends, particularly since Chateaubriand entered the ministry. She had a passion for receiving literary and political celebrities, as well as men of family. Now she foresaw that two of the glories of her collection were likely to fall from their allegiance. Not wishing to contemplate their infidelities too closely she decided to absent herself for some while in order to give their rivalries time to lessen. The quarrels and animosities of these men commenced to make life intolerable, and she felt that soon they would refuse to listen to her. Her niece was suffering from an attack of bronchitis, and she took this as a pretext to quit Paris and carry the girl to Italy. They left on November 2, 1823, accompanied by Ballanche and J. J. Ampère.

Travelling by short stages, at each town Madame Récamier received letters from her friends. Chateaubriand was the most assiduous correspondent. Possibly he was still unpardoned, for his letters did not obtain long answers, and, from Chambéry one note addressed him as " monsieur." " The ' monsieur ' has frozen me," rejoined the minister. " You must admit that I have not deserved it."

Doubtless, before parting, Madame Récamier begged both Chateaubriand and Montmorency to be on better terms towards each other during her absence, and asked them to keep her acquainted with the news of Paris.

[1] *Causeries du lundi*, Vol. XIV., p. 317, note.
[2] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. II., p. 29.

About the end of the month she reached Rome,[1] and found there an old friend. Adrien, Duc de Laval, ambassador of France, consoled her for the absence of her other friends, and showed her the most eager attention. He aided her in the improvisation of a salon, for the hermit of the Abbaye-aux-Bois did not love solitude any more in Rome than in Paris. Amongst the Frenchmen the Duc de Laval brought to her were Guérin, the director of the French School at Rome, and author of the finest portrait of Bonaparte which exists; the estimable Séroux d'Agincourt, who was finishing his *Histoire de l'art par les monuments depuis le IV^e siècle*, which had cost him thirty years of labour; Léopold Robert, who had not yet painted his *Retour des moissonneurs*, and did not dream of his distressing fate; and other artists, who, by their originality and frankness, created a very different atmosphere from that which dominated the salon of the Abbaye-aux-Bois. She had the satisfaction, but only for a short period, of meeting at Rome an old friend of London and Paris, the Duchess of Devonshire. Shortly after their meeting the English duchess had to deplore the death of her friend, Cardinal Gonsalvi. She followed him to the tomb in a few weeks, and Madame Récamier had the sad consolation of closing the eyes of this great lady.

Her letters to Chateaubriand were courteously communicated by him to his enemy Mathieu, who reciprocated with his own letters. Madame Récamier had desired this, for she believed that such an exchange might bring their hostilities to a close. One part of the exquisite art of this amiable woman consisted of merging in a more or less durable concord all the discords between her friends. She strongly wanted to preserve as friends these two men of high rank. To allow their quarrel to grow deeper simply meant that they would not attend her salon. Happily they did

[1] She took up her residence in the Via Babouino. "The Via Babouino," wrote J. J. Ampère, "in spite of its insignificant look and its grotesque name, is one of the streets I love best here. Madame Récamier lived in front of the Greek church in 1823. I lived there with Ballanche." (André-Marie et J. J. Ampère. *Correspondance et souvenirs*, Vol. II., p. 230.)

not dream of abandoning her, but the situation was very strained. In his letters, Mathieu obstinately refused to refer to his rival by name, which was not a sign of pacification. In speaking of the election of Benjamin Constant, he told Madame Récamier that he thought it would "satisfy that friend you have who sent me your last letter. . . . We are still gracious and polite towards each other, but not intimate. I remained for a quarter of an hour at the commencement of his ball. It was very beautiful, and it is said that he himself was delighted at the effect. It is not in this respect that I envy him." [1]

Towards the end of February, the Duchesse de Saint-Leu, otherwise known as Queen Hortense, came to Rome. She met Madame Récamier in Saint Peter's, and the latter did not conceal her embarrassment. For her friends were royalists, particularly the Duc de Laval. As Madame Récamier did not wish to visit or to receive the Duchesse, she assumed a constrained and frigid attitude. Napoleon's daughter-in-law noticed it, and understood the motives. She asked for an interview. Madame Récamier could not refuse it, and they arranged to meet as if by chance on their excursions. The next day they met in the Coliseum. Hortense's son, the Prince Louis Napoleon, walked with Ampère, whilst the two ladies exchanged their impressions. As Madame Récamier did not wholly throw off her coldness, Josephine's daughter tried to explain her conduct in 1815. She endeavoured to justify herself, as she tried to justify her conduct in 1814 to Napoleon. There has been a tendency to pass over these blemishes, which did not reveal a fine character, or any sense of gratitude stronger than her interpretation of conjugal fidelity. Other promenades and excursions were organised.

In a fragment of the *Mémoires* which escaped destruction, being afterwards published by Madame Lenormant in the *Souvenirs et Correspondance*, Madame Récamier tells the story of an amusement not altogether new to her. In spite of her forty-seven years, she accepted an invitation to a

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. II., p. 71

masked ball given by Torlonia, the great Roman banker. "I arrived at the ball with the Duc de Laval-Montmorency. In the midst of the immense and brilliant crowd I looked for the Queen, and at last found her accompanied by Prince Jerome Bonaparte. Whilst passing and repassing, we exchanged words, and soon arranged a little plot. When the crowd was thickest, I suddenly quitted the Duc de Laval, and, after a few steps, hastily took off my garland. The Queen, watching my movement, gave me her bouquet in exchange, and took my place on the arm of the ambassador of Louis XVIII., whilst I occupied her place under the care of the ex-King of Westphalia.[1] She quickly saw herself surrounded by all the representatives of the foreign powers, whilst I was in the centre of the Bonapartes who were in Rome. She amused herself at the diplomatic greetings attracted by the presence of the ambassador, I was in my turn perhaps astonished at the revelation of regrets and hopes not usually unveiled so freely. Before there was any suspicion of the exchange we took our former places. Then at a further meeting we changed again. We repeated the game until it ceased to amuse us, which soon happened. For anything that amuses is in its very nature not durable."[2]

Besides, the trick became known, resulting in a certain reserve in royalist society, as well as amongst the Bonapartists, and the members of the Corps Diplomatique.

After having made several excursions in the neighbourhood of Rome with Hortense, Madame Récamier remarked amiably and ironically, that she found but one fault in the Queen. She was not enough Bonapartist. This was

[1] Jerome (1784-1860), was fifteen years younger than his brother Napoleon. He served in the navy, went to the United States, and married Miss Elizabeth Paterson, of Baltimore, in 1803. Napoleon annulled the marriage, and Jerome returned to France. In 1807 he was created King of Westphalia, marrying the daughter of the King of Wurtemberg. He fought at Waterloo, but did not return to Paris until 1847. He was the father of Princess Mathilde, and grandfather of Prince Victor Napoleon, the present head of the family.

[2] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. II., p. 81.

JEROME NAPOLEON, KING OF WESTPHALIA
*After a contemporary portrait*

no praise for Napoleon's daughter-in-law. However, Hortense's sympathy for Madame Récamier was evidently sincere, for, in her will, she bequeathed to Madame Récamier the lace she wore on the day they met at St. Peter's.

Madame Récamier reported her adventure to her friends in Paris. Mathieu took advantage of it to address her a sermon upon her political imprudence. Chateaubriand also wrote, but he had not the bad taste to send her a sermon. He limited himself to a little criticism of Mathieu, and some mockery at the other's lack of political intuition. Both letters agreed in one respect—a wish for the speedy return of the traveller.

The peace between the two men was hardly sincere. "I dined the other day at this rival's house, and by his side," wrote Mathieu. "The conversation was easy. But we never became expansive, and the subject we are most reserved upon is perhaps you." Chateaubriand, who did not fear burning his fingers in writing the name of his rival, described the same dinner. "You do not reproach me for my perfidy towards Mathieu. You know what he is, and what he thinks himself. He dined yesterday with me, and sat by my side."

Madame Récamier was reassured. Although the ill-feeling still existed between her friends, yet appearances were safeguarded, and the outward aspect was her chief anxiety. At the end of a letter written during the following week, Mathieu said: "I remain always on the same footing with a man of your acquaintance. We are obliging to each other without being intimate, or exchanging reciprocal confidences." [1]

Spring came, and Madame Récamier dreamed of Paris. But she feared again envenoming two hatreds not yet appeased. "If I return to Paris just now I shall find the agitation which made me leave. If Monsieur de Chateaubriand acted badly towards me, I should have much grief; if he acted well, a trouble that I am resolved to escape."

This sentence tells us exactly her feelings towards Chateau-

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. II., p. 100.

briand. Mathieu had already noticed her disposition, and for this reason refused to pardon the man who had not only replaced him at the ministry, but had also supplanted him by the side of Madame Récamier. For this reason he called him " my successor." Madame Récamier determined to remain in Italy another six months.

There was a second reason for the extension of her residence. Madame Récamier had not escaped the mystic atmosphere of the eternal city, and religion entered into her sentiments. Mathieu was not altogether a stranger to this new state of soul. He had been preparing the ground for a long while. The Duc de Laval had also mentioned the subject to his cousin. Mathieu was overjoyed at the change, which would bring her more into sympathy with him and prepared the way for his definite ascendancy.

Madame Récamier left Rome, and, always under the escort of her faithful friends Ballanche and Ampère, passed the rest of the summer at Naples. She arrived there during the heat of July 1, 1824.

In the meanwhile great events were taking place in the political and parliamentary world of Paris, and Madame Récamier's " great friend " had been playing the principal rôle. Monsieur de Villèle, President of the Council, had presented a suggested law for the conversion of " rentes." The Chamber voted it by a feeble majority. Chateaubriand refused to support it before the Chamber of Peers, and the act was rejected. For some time Monsieur de Villèle believed that the poet-statesman was seeking to supplant him, and he suspected Chateaubriand of organising the strong opposition which had defeated his law in the Chamber of Peers. Wounded vanity also embittered the situation. Monsieur de Villèle complained to the King, who was disposed to listen to his grievances. Madame du Cayla, the intimate friend of the Vicomte Sosthène de la Rochefoucauld, who was related to Mathieu de Montmorency, now one of the King's favourites, supported Monsieur de Villèle against Chateaubriand. And the man who had re-established France, and deposed England was dismissed—in Chateaubriand's own

words—" like a valet surprised stealing his master's watch from the mantelpiece."

If Madame Récamier had a wish it was that Chateaubriand should relinquish politics. She was fully informed of the course of affairs by her friends Adrien and Montmorency. But these gentlemen, diplomatists by profession, were extremely discreet and reserved in their letters. They limited themselves to sending Madame Récamier to the pages of the *Journal des Débats* and the *Quotidienne* for details.

Chateaubriand suspected them, and believed Madame Récamier to be more attached to the party of Mathieu than she was in reality. So his correspondence became intermittent. On his side Mathieu deplored the absence of their common friend, because he believed Madame Récamier could have been useful to him in his intrigues. In other words, he could better have used his influence over her by endeavouring to influence Chateaubriand.

At Naples, Madame Récamier lived in a very quiet circle. The summer does not attract strangers to that town. She frequently made excursions in the morning, and promenades in the evening. The presence of Ballanche and Ampère [1] gave the conversation an archæological atmosphere which Madame Récamier did not fail to profit by, although perhaps unconsciously. During this summer at Naples, she made the acquaintance of Charles Lenormant, who had been travelling in Greater Greece, and who soon was to have his share in her family affection. To a certain extent he took the place of Ampère, who was called back to France by the bad health of his venerable father.

Charles Lenormant was young, and learned in the antiquities of Greece, Rome, Egypt, and Chaldea. Although his knowledge made him at times rather absent-minded, he

[1] Ten years later, Ampère, going to Italy, wrote from the roadstead of Genoa to Madame Récamier : " We have not seen Genoa together, but I continually dream of those beautiful evening promenades to Chiaja, reminded by the phosphorescent sea that I find again here, and the tiny white and golden veils which float across the water." (André-Marie et J. J. Ampère. *Correspondance et souvenirs*, Vol. II., p. 56.)

knew how to enter the world and participate in the distribution of rewards and favours. Thus he was able to please Madame Récamier, whose high and powerful relations he did not ignore. He also succeeded in interesting her niece, Mademoiselle Cyvoct, whose health was now thoroughly re-established. When Madame Récamier left Naples, she made him promise to visit her at Rome.

She reached the Eternal City towards the close of the autumn. The Duc de Laval, whose vacation had expired, came shortly after. His fascinating tale included the death of Louis XVIII., the accession of Charles X., the intrigues of the Court, and the gossip of the salons concerning a thousand people she knew well, particularly Chateaubriand. Neither with this statesman nor with Mathieu was the duke on close terms of friendship, but he preserved towards them an irreproachable courtesy through regard for their mutual friend in Italy.

The winter festivities soon brought a crowd of strangers to Rome. Madame Lenormant in her writings is pleased to set out at length the aristocratic names of her aunt's visitors. Amongst them were the Duc de Noailles, who will be mentioned later, and Madame Swetchine, upon whom Madame Récamier made a favourable impression.

Mathieu continued to write to Madame Récamier. The chief subject of his letters was naturally his relationship with Chateaubriand. She had already exacted a pledge that the two men would not quarrel, and their intercourse was not wholly unpleasant. "We have no intimacy, or real confidences," wrote Mathieu on January 26, 1825.

In the meanwhile she paid a visit to the ex-Queen of Naples, who now called herself Comtesse de Lipona, and lived in Trieste under the watchful eye of the Austrian government. This surveillance was mitigated by Metternich, who had not forgotten his amiable relations with the Princess Caroline during the Empire. Madame Récamier was accompanied as far as Venice by Charles Lenormant. This young man had passed the winter in Rome, and had been acknowledged as the fiancè of Mademoiselle Cyvoct. They

parted at Venice. Madame Récamier and her niece went to Trieste, whilst Lenormant continued his journey to Paris. The two ladies were soon on the same road and Madame Récamier arrived in the capital when all her friends were at Rheims attending the coronation of the new king, Charles X.

Montmorency wanted to know how the first interview passed between Madame Récamier and Chateaubriand. Contrary to his expectations, and perhaps his hopes, all went off well. Far from losing his place in Juliette's affection, the genius anchored himself more firmly than before. Mathieu's bitterness increased, and there is a trace of malicious satisfaction in the insinuations which he made to excite Madame Récamier's jealousy. "It seems to me that the affairs of your melancholy friend do not advance much. Perhaps his last escapades will baffle the actions of another friend." [1] Some months later his jealousy is more clearly manifested. Speaking of the Vallée-aux-Loups, where he hoped soon to receive Madame Récamier, Mathieu frets himself with the idea that she will perhaps be capable of thinking of another when she is in residence. He regrets to be out of Paris. "Do you know that one of the things which displeases me is the perpetual assiduity of the former proprietor.[2] If, in a vein of generous independence for the cause, he writes some beautiful pages, for he is capable, and they have been announced, you will probably be deeply touched. . . . What I think so fine, in so grave a history, is that his wife pleases you. I should never have guessed it. I esteem her, but I have never felt any other impression." [3]

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. II., p. 182. This other friend was the Duchesse de Duras.

[2] He obstinately refused to write the detested name.

[3] *Souvenirs et correspondance*, Vol. II., p. 187.

## CHAPTER X

IT is time that some reference should be made to Madame de Chateaubriand. She was a little woman with much common-sense and intelligence. Her pen was as alert as her tongue, which is saying much. Assuredly they were far too active to the liking of her illustrious spouse. Madame de Chateaubriand had to complain of more than one frolic on the part of a man who had sworn fidelity to her at the foot of the altar. She could not always succeed in ignoring his deeds. "Every Achilles has his heel," said Chateaubriand, and the heel of the author of the *Génie du christianisme* was a broad and Christian spirit on certain subjects, and, as regards conjugal fidelity, to be anything but a bigot in his behaviour. Thus Madame de Chateaubriand, who loved and had always loved her husband, suffered much after her marriage, and was not invariably mistress of herself. How could she have controlled her tongue? Of absolutely irreproachable conduct, she would have been perfect if she had extended a little more indulgence and Christian charity towards a man who gave her the opportunity to exercise two virtues which are so rare amongst women. But she was unable, for she saw her husband continually running after "the beautiful ladies," to use her own phrase.

Being a Breton, she was gifted with that tenacity which distinguishes the daughters of Armorica. Yet, endowed so richly that one could hardly wish her to be given more, she had been spoilt in her infancy by the old uncle who educated her by allowing her to do whatever she wished. Thus her nature had become far from docile. The Vicomt-

MADAME DE CHATEAUBRIAND
*After a contemporary engraving*

esse had an extremely difficult humour. Her spirit of contradiction was stronger than in most women. She was pious, but at times she seemed determined to make her husband unhappy on earth in order that he might gain heaven. If the *Génie du christianisme* and *Les Martyres* did not ensure his eternal salvation, his wife did. But she gave more to him than he returned to her. Her heart was essentially good, in spite of appearances to the contrary, which have given rise to more than one unfavourable judgment.[1] She passed through many trials, but Fontanes, and Joubert—above all the great Joubert—would never have given their unrestricted friendship to Chateaubriand's wife if she had not been worthy of it. Her best apology can be found in the works of her historian, to whom I refer the reader.[2]

Chateaubriand himself introduced the Vicomtesse at the Abbaye-aux-Bois. Perhaps he did this to reassure her as to the nature of his friendship with Madame Récamier; perhaps in the hope that some of the roughnesses of her Breton nature might be polished away. Madame Récamier received the wife of the man she monopolised with her most gracious smile. Madame de Chateaubriand grumbled as little as possible.[3] To the world she was less bitter than to her husband, and knew how to please.

The relations between these two women were not limited to a single exchange of visits, but continued for the remainder of their lives. Madame de Chateaubriand was not jealous of Madame Récamier. She realised that her coquetry, as well as the amiability of her own husband, were simply platonic and on the surface. In that respect she was at rest. Possibly she preferred to see the volatile author visit

[1] By Mathieu de Montmorency for instance. See also Victor Hugo, *Choses vues*, p. 206; Baron de Vitrolles, *Mémoires*, Vol. II., p. 466; Comte d'Haussonville, *Ma jeunesse*, p. 177-180.

[2] G. Pailhès. It is impossible to find books so well documented, and so fascinating, about the great author and his wife.

[3] "Madame de Chateaubriand grumbles." Chateaubriand to Madame Récamier, May 14, 1822. *Souvenirs et correspondance*, Vol. I., p. 398. See also Vol. II., p. 235, 334.

the Abbaye-aux-Bois than elsewhere. Besides, she made use of Madame Récamier's ability to share acts of benevolence with her friends. The Vicomtesse had the ambition not only to do good, but to be known as a woman of good works. Through the intervention of Madame Récamier, Madame de Chateaubriand was able to obtain subscriptions, official favours, assistance for hospitals, and help for protégées whom the Revolution had ruined. Thus the *entente* between the two women became complete. One ceded her husband; the other her influence. With an amiable and ceremonious reserve there was not the slightest discord between them.

About this time Madame Récamier obtained a favour from the Vicomte Sosthène de la Rochefoucauld (who was related to Mathieu), the director of the Beaux-Arts. He nominated Charles Lenormant [1] as inspector of the Beaux-Arts. In cultivating the acquaintance of Madame Récamier, this young man had made his fortune. He married her niece, Mademoiselle Amélie Cyvoct, on February 1, 1826, in the chapel attached to the Abbaye-aux-Bois.

Madame Récamier soon became engrossed in a little intrigue, and its success gave her much joy. Sometimes she mixed in politics and gave her friends advice when they were ministers. She now wished to share with them another distraction. She remembered that certain ladies of the preceding century, such as Madame de Lambert, Madame de Tencin, Madame Geoffrin, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and her witty patron, Madame du Deffand, had exercised

[1] Later, Monsieur Lenormant became professor at the Collège de France. He had the temperament of a born professor, and, if we are to believe Sainte-Beuve, this vocation was completed by the addition of mannerisms which Lenormant thought indispensable to such an employment. (See the piquant portrait drawn by Sainte-Beuve in *Causeries du lundi*, Vol. IX., pp. 414-415.) His back was very supple to the different powers which succeeded each other in France from 1826, and he gained a step at every change of government, until, in 1859, he died a member of the Institute. Like d'Argenson, he could say: "My enemies can do as they like, they can never destroy me. There is nobody more servile than I." Be mediocre, mean, and cringing, and success may always be depended upon.

influence over the elections to the Académie Française. Madame Récamier had the idea of making academicians.

Madame de Tencin was pleased to call her friends "my beasts." Could not Madame Récamier, without a miracle, change her "beasts" into academicians? She would make one, then two, then three, finishing by herding all her stock under the cupola of the Palais Mazarin. "A man could hardly be received in the Academy if he had not been presented to, and by Madame de Lambert," wrote d'Argenson in the eighteenth century. Why could not Madame Récamier become a new Madame de Lambert? Chateaubriand, who had been for a long period a member of the illustrious band, would patronise her candidates. Through deference for this old warrior and his genius, the others would vote as he desired. Thus she would hold the Academy in her hand.

As a commencement she furthered the candidature of Mathieu de Montmorency. She knew that the Academy felt the need of including some noble aristocrats in its ranks—as a parvenue attempts to lure them into her salon. Mathieu was a duke, a Montmorency, a millionaire, and on terms of intimacy with the King. He had also been a minister. All these positions were far superior to any literary qualification. And as it was necessary to prove that a candidate was able to write, she could exhibit a collection of edifying epistles from the noble duke, which would cast the works of Saint Paul into the shade.

Having every chance of election, Mathieu offered himself as a candidate. His ducal pride decidedly detracted from his Christian humility. Besides, Chateaubriand, who wished only what Madame Récamier desired, considered his honour as a gentleman at stake, and did more for the rival he did not like than for a true friend of merit. He took charge of the electoral intrigue, and gained the support of Monsieur Roger, which made the business a certainty. Possibly the reader does not remember the name of Monsieur Roger. And, indeed, nothing is forgotten more quickly than the names of the Immortals. Roger, according to Sainte-

Beuve,[1] had intelligence and enthusiasm, and all the engaging qualities of youth. Roger was the Great-Elector of the Academy. No one could hope to pass in if he had not fawned upon this fanatical royalist—who would have been a fanatical Bonapartist if the Empire had still been in being. He was described by the Duchesse d'Abrantès as a person "whose portrait would have appeared strange in any other time than our own, and above all that of the restoration." And she says that he was ready to kneel and worship power, position, and credit, no matter from what quarter they came. Together Chateaubriand and Roger vigorously pushed the cause of their candidate, and Mathieu was hoisted into his academic armchair.

Madame Récamier's success was great. She went to the séance, and mixed with the brilliant feminine public of the Academy, and breathed the purest Faubourg Saint Germain. And at night there was festivity and joy in the blue salon of the Abbaye-aux-Bois!

But cries of revenge came from the liberal party. The new academician, to put an end to the clamour, decided to content himself with the honour of the seat, and renounced the income attached to it, which could then benefit a man of letters. Madame Récamier agreed with the duke, but, before proceeding to the choice of the beneficiary of this pension, she wished to consult a professional author.

At the Vallée-aux-Loups she had known Monsieur de Latouche, whose real name was Thalsand. He came originally from Berry, where his family still lives. He possessed wit and intelligence, and some erratic knowledge such as was acquired under the Revolution, the Directory, and the Consulate,—together with great distinction of manner and some physical imperfections. Madame Récamier would probably never have dreamed of taking the advice of an author, who, despite his delicacy, had embarked in the commerce of literature when writing the *Histoire du procès Fualdès*, and a few other books. They enabled him, however, to acquire his little hermitage of Aulnay, close to the

[1] Sainte-Beuve. *Causeries du lundi*, Vol. IX., p. 444.

Vallée-aux-Loups. When he undertook the publication of the *Poésies* of André Chénier he became acknowledged as a man of taste amongst contemporary writers. Teasing, joking, malicious, with a biting wit (Sosthène de la Rochefoucauld knew something about that), yet amiable and open-handed because he had intelligence, Latouche wrote verse, novels, and articles for the journals. He boldly advertised his liberal opinions. Desiring to stop the liberal discontent at the election of Mathieu, Madame Récamier thought it would be a clever move to consult Monsieur de Latouche upon the new academician's choice of a pensioner. Latouche seemed to have a predilection for literary women, for it was he who at a later date launched George Sand. One day, in the presence of Madame Récamier, he had greatly praised Madame Desbordes-Valmore. But certain scruples would not permit the amiable author of so many pretty verses to accept a pension which was not all academic in spite of its origin. Her refusal was so nobly phrased that Madame Récamier, rivalling the benevolence of her friends, obtained for the poet a royal pension of a thousand francs.

Monsieur de Montmorency's title of academician having made him a man of letters, he had the wisdom not to write. Charles X. chose him as governor to the Duc de Bordeaux. But he was not destined to enjoy for long these new favours, which were almost funereal honours. He died suddenly on Good Friday, March 24, 1826, whilst kneeling in pious meditation in the Church of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Such a death, whilst afflicting his friends, was regarded by them as the mark of special grace from heaven. "What a beautiful death!" wrote the Duchesse de Broglie to Madame Récamier. "He would have chosen no other place, day, or hour. The hand of God, the Saviour whose sacrifice he was celebrating, is visible! Now he is with Him."

In her grief at having lost so old a friend, Madame Récamier, whilst receiving a thousand condolences, did not forget to offer her sympathy to the widow, who had a better right to weep. Mathieu de Montmorency had neglected his marriage duties. After the death of the only son of his cousin

Adrien, he returned to his wife, who had been abandoned for more than a quarter of a century. But the last heir had died, and, with the death of Mathieu, the name of Montmorency became extinct.

The ups and downs of politics deposed Monsieur de Villèle, and carried Monsieur de Martignac to the presidency of the Council. Chateaubriand had exerted the whole force of his talent and personal dislike to bring about this result in the government machine. His services had to be recognised.[1] After the outrage that had been committed on him by the late King, Chateaubriand considered that he could only re-enter political life by means of the department from which he had been ejected. But no minister cared to sit next to so independent a colleague. The lion was caressed and fondled, his claws were polished and cut, and he was given a golden chain. He also received his salary as a minister, dated from the day he had ceased to act. From this source, says Monsieur Pasquier, he gained the sum of 150,000 francs from the funds at the disposal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This was not all. Seeing that he was unlikely to obtain the portfolio he wished, he allowed it to be known that he would accept as compensation the embassy at Rome. But that office was filled by the Duc de Laval, who had no desire to quit a post so entirely to his taste. The business appeared difficult to arrange, but Madame Récamier was able to manage it. She told the Duc de Laval that she wanted to see Chateaubriand at Rome, and that if the duke would cede the embassy, he would get as an indemnity the far more important embassy at Vienna. Chateaubriand wrote that he would accept Rome only upon condition that the duke left of his free will. The Duc de Laval went to Vienna, whilst Chateaubriand, overjoyed,

[1] Chateaubriand did not hide his need of money. Monsieur de Coriolis wrote to the Abbé de Lamennais on November 8, 1825: "As he tells me, he is without position, without honour, without fortune. . . (*Correspondance de La Mennais*, Vol. I., p. 213.) "Chateaubriand wished at first to have some money; afterwards 500,000 francs a year for the *Journal des Debats*, and the title of duke for himself." (Monsieur de Vitrolles to the Abbé de Lamennais, Paris, January 27, 1828, *ibid.* p. 425.)

started to take possession of the embassy formerly held by Cardinal Fesch, to whom he had once acted as secretary. With him travelled Madame de Chateaubriand, and, when saying good-bye, Madame Récamier expressed the hope that she would soon join them.

From every place where they halted during the journey, Chateaubriand wrote to her. He set down the impressions of his travels, as well as his ideas upon passing events and European diplomacy. He spoke of his youth, of Madame de Custine, who had died at Bex, and of Madame de Duras, who was about to die at Nice. At Rome he recollected Madame de Beaumont, the memory of whom came more than once to his mind. Madame Récamier was not jealous. These were but recollections of the dead, whilst she was in Paris and very much alive. She did not fear Madame de Chateaubriand so much as she feared the ambassador's own fidelity. He laughed at her apprehensions, and excited her jealousy by the recital of a little adventure with an Englishwoman, terminating with the consoling words : " Don't be troubled. This eccentric foreigner was neither young nor pretty." In the meanwhile, Madame de Chateaubriand watched over him so severely that he sometimes fled from her prim household to others more agreeable—which was not difficult.

Chateaubriand wrote to Madame Récamier three times a week. These letters, with the other distractions of the Eternal City,[1] helped him to pass the time. Suddenly, as by enchantment, he found himself at the end of a sojourn of eighteen months, which, if we except his domestic worries, had passed without a shadow. There is a curious avowal in his correspondence. " Madame de Chateaubriand is more stormy than ever. I am mixed up to-day in scenes with the servants, and this in the middle of my despatches, the death of the Pope, and the political agitations of Paris." [2] Politics amused René, but not domestic disturbances.

[1] " Others, besides Madame Récamier, procured him agreeable distractions." Comte d'Haussonville, *Ma jeunesse*, p. 185. Monsieur d'Haussonville was then attached to the French embassy at Rome.

[2] *Souvenirs et correspondance*, Vol. II., p. 331.

There had indeed been political troubles in Paris. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Monsieur de la Ferronays, had been replaced by the Duc de Laval. But the duke refused to accept the post, and profited from the general movement to exchange the embassy at Vienna for that at London. Monsieur Portalis then became interim foreign minister.

After witnessing the assembling of the conclave and the election of a new Pope, Chateaubriand returned to Paris well satisfied. Without waiting a day, he visited Madame Récamier. In the most picturesque language, and drawing a dazzling picture, he submitted a scheme he had been considering for some while. To ensure their future, and their happiness, he suggested that they both should retire to Rome, where they could pass the remainder of their days together in tranquillity. They would live in the little Palazzo Caffarelli, on the Capitol. Ballanche and Ampère, their other friends, would join them, thus forming a most charming French colony on the banks of the Tiber.[1] René had even bought in advance some English horses.[2]

Madame Récamier was in the seventh heaven of delight. "I was overjoyed to find him more happy than I anticipated," she wrote to her niece. "The arrival of Monsieur de Chateaubriand has given my life fresh animation just when it seemed ready to be extinguished." [3]

After having paid his court to Madame Récamier, Chateaubriand presented himself to the King, Charles X. Then he travelled south to the Pyrenees to take the waters at Cauterets. Before he left Paris, Madame Récamier, in order to be agreeable to him, gave a grand evening reception. The attraction was the reading of his tragedy, *Moïse*. "Yesterday," wrote Ballanche on June 18, 1829, to Madame Lenormant, "there was the most brilliant assembly at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, Lafont, of the Comédie-Française, read

[1] *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. V., pp. 229-232.

[2] *Journal du maréchal de Castellane*, August 22, 1829. He paid 15,000 francs for them.

[3] *Souvenirs et correspondance*, Vol. II., p. 376.

very badly because the manuscript was in such a confused state. But Monsieur de Chateaubriand tried reading it himself, so this gave an interest which was found lacking in the recital. At the same time, your aunt was on thorns. Still, you can remain sure that everything was very well done, and that the impression created was what she naturally intended it to be, namely a sensation of complete admiration. Amongst the audience I limit myself to cite Mesdames Appony, de Fontanes, and Gay, Messieurs Cousin, Villemain, Le Brun, Lamartine, La Touche, Dubois, Saint-Marc Girardin, Valery, Mérimée, Gérard, the Ducs de Doudeauville, and de Broglie, Messieurs de Sainte-Aulaire, de Barante, David, Madame de Boigne, Madame de Gramont, the Baron Pasquier, Madame and Mademoiselle de Barante, the Mesdemoiselles de Sainte-Aulaire, Dugas-Monthel, etc."[1]

Invitations to these receptions of the recluse of the Abbaye-aux-Bois were eagerly sought after. Surely the hand of the good Ballanche trembled with a vain emotion as he inscribed the chosen names of the most distinguished men and women of Paris in art, letters and fashion. *Moïse* was not a great success, but the author received compliments as enthusiastic as if it had been the most brilliant composition in literature. Madame Récamier shared in the congratulations, and acknowledged them with the blushes of a schoolgirl. Then, whilst her illustrious friend travelled to the Pyrenees, she went to Dieppe, a town for which she had a particular fancy. Ballanche accompanied her. More like a servant than a friend, he rendered a thousand little services during the journey, although he was not at all clever as a courier. But Madame Récamier could never travel alone, and, without a cavalier, would not have taken the road at all.

At Cauterets Chateaubriand learned of the formation of the Polignac ministry. His cure ended, he returned to Paris, regretting that he could not go sooner to Rome. Displeased with Monsieur de Polignac, who tried to coax him, and annoyed with the King, who did not wish to receive him, he tendered his resignation as ambassador to Rome.

[1] *Madame Récamier et les amis de sa jeunesse*, p. 196.

This ruined his scheme for transplanting the little colony of the Abbaye-aux-Bois to the Eternal City. It was also a pecuniary disaster. Madame Récamier tried to make him forget this aspect, for Madame de Chateaubriand was too much shattered by the domestic misfortune to be of any help. Besides she never had the amenities of consolation at her call.

Life at the Abbaye-aux-Bois was quite patriarchal. When Monsieur and Madame Lenormant were in Paris they dined with their aunt. Monsieur Récamier, who lived with them, came at the same time, and Ballanche joined the party. The atmosphere was one of peace, and, after the meal, they passed the evening together. It was rare that other friends did not call. This was happiness.

Suddenly this monotonous existence received a shock. Monsieur Récamier was struck down with inflammation of the chest, and died at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, where he was taken, on April 19, 1830. Madame Récamier, according to what Madame Lenormant has written, " thought she had lost her father for a second time." This expression may be considered as confirming the natural relationship which is said to have existed between Juliette Bernard and Récamier.

On account of her mourning, Madame Récamier left for Dieppe in 1830 earlier than usual. Chateaubriand tells us that she occupied rooms which looked on to the beach. The sea baths did her much good, and contributed to the preservation of that air of youth which distinguished her in so astonishing a manner until her last day. Sometimes the young priest Lacordaire came to talk with her. His dawning talent was beginning to be the subject of comment, and the little circle of the Abbaye-aux-Bois—as religious as it was worldly—had need of him. Chateaubriand arrived at Dieppe only to be told of the publication of the Ordinances,[1]

[1] The famous Ordinances, signed July 25, 1830, included suppression of the liberty of the press, dissolution of the chamber of deputies, and a new system of election which secured the King's absolute power. Within three days Paris was in revolt, and, after

which had indeed been issued on the day he left Paris, July 29. Ballanche, stepping at that moment from the diligence, brought him the newspapers. Chateaubriand immediately returned to Paris, troubled by a presentiment of evil.

Anxious about her friend, and fearing that another revolution was brewing, Madame Récamier and Ampère followed him.[1] At Saint Denis they found barricades. She had to leave her carriage, and make the rest of the journey on foot to the Abbaye-aux-Bois, under the escort of Ampère and her maid.

The legitimate monarchy fell with Charles X. A constitutional monarchy was built up on the ruins, and the Duc d'Orléans, under the name of Louis Philippe, became King of the French. These great events upset the little society of the Abbaye-aux-Bois. A woman rarely has sincere political feelings, and, like other women, Madame Récamier was the reflection of the man who had the most influence over her for the moment. By reason of her middle-class origin she had a natural tendency towards liberalism. Through her friendships she was allied to the past. But, because Chateaubriand was in reality a liberal, and did not hide his thoughts on Louis XVIII., Charles X., and the court of the Tuileries, Madame Récamier could not weep for the old régime, although she regretted the salons of the duchesses in which she had shone. She realised that she would have to continue what she had been doing under the Directory, the Consulate, and the Restoration. She would have to court the men in authority until she became a power herself. She would re-people her salon with the politicians dispersed by the fall of Charles X., and they would readily fraternise with those who were expecting fortune through the elevation of Louis Philippe. Endowed with the gift of attracting and retaining the friendship of the most

severe fighting the troops fraternised with the mob. On August 2 Charles X. abdicated in favour of his grandson Henri, Duc de Bordeaux, but the crown was offered to, and accepted by, Louis Philippe, Duc d'Orléans, son of Philippe Égalite.

eminent men, she would continue to seduce them by the amiable and gracious ways her experience of life had taught her to employ to their highest perfection. She would gather round her the new men, the younger talents, the celebrities of the day, and as many as possible of those who might be celebrities to-morrow.

Meanwhile her salon was the refuge of all the grievances of the fallen party. The events of July, 1830, provoked inexhaustible discussions. There were bitter recriminations against Polignac, Charles X., and their imbecile advisers. Madame Récamier, against her will, was obliged to preside over stormy gatherings, which transformed her drawing-room into a little parliament. In their train came the bitterness, the violent language, the passionate outbursts, so distasteful to a woman whose inclination was towards order and moderation. The conquered party of the Abbaye-aux-Bois had divided support. For example, Ampère did not dissimulate his hopes for the new state of things. He believed it would lead towards a government more dignified for a country like France, where so much talent was ready to be employed on the onward march of humanity towards emancipation, liberty, and happiness. Lenormant had the same ideas. He saw in the revolution another opportunity for self-advancement. Chateaubriand had difficulty in reconciling his royalist opinions with his republican tendencies, and his devotion towards the Bourbons with his desire for liberty. These events completely overturned the political and philosophical systems of Ballanche. He handed in his resignation, occupying himself simply with a complaint as to his deception.

Even more than Ballanche, Chateaubriand resigned every activity, except that of an author. He now issued a virulent pamphlet, *De la Restauration et de la monarchie élective*. Then, with the sale of this work—for his purse was always empty—and the conversion into cash of his epaulettes and the gold lace and embroidery from his uniforms, he set out for Switzerland in company with his wife. The Duc de Laval retired to Normandy. The other royalists of mark

followed his example, and settled down on their estates. As before, they left to providence the task of re-establishing on the throne the king of their dreams.

Upon his return to Paris, having no longer any public functions to occupy his leisure, Chateaubriand visited Madame Récamier oftener than before. In spite of his patience, his wife's recriminations wearied him. The reductions he had been compelled to make in his domestic budget did not render her more tractable. The resulting unpleasantness drove him every afternoon to the Abbaye-aux-Bois. There he enjoyed "his hour," and while it lasted no one was admitted into the temple. A solemn and mysterious twilight overshadowed the rooms. The curtains were partially drawn across the windows, admitting a light which was favourable for a woman who had lost her youth. The great writer entered, and took his armchair by the side of the fireplace. With his eternal air of weariness he received the incense of the grand-priestess, and tasted the honey of her soft words. Chateaubriand was quite contented with it. He had grown old since his return from Rome, although but a short while had in reality elapsed. That was in 1829, when Philarète Chasles had described him as "always young . . . and at the age of sixty, with a perfect courtesy and joyous gracefulness which never left him, mounting the tiny staircase in the Rue de l'Abbaye more nimbly than a musketeer of nineteen." [1] The Revolution of July, his retreat from public life, his financial embarrassment—which put an end to his dreams of happiness on the banks of the Tiber—rendered him more sombre than ever. In the world he so much loved his attitude had been somewhat sad. This melancholy, together with the morose side of his nature, gained the upper hand. What had formerly been an affectation and a pose now became a habit. Each day he soothed his humour with the soft music of Madame Récamier's restful words. "Before my departure from Paris," wrote Balzac to Doctor Ménière, "I saw Monsieur de Chateaubriand at Madame Récamier's. I found

[1] Philarète Chasles. *Mémoires*, Vol. I., p. 180.

him very sulky and very sad." [1] This was not a passing depression, such as most men experience, but his ordinary condition. Madame Récamier did all she could to distract her exhausted friend, but Miss Mary Clarke had gone, and she succeeded with difficulty. One of the most fashionable ladies of the period wrote that " Madame Récamier's salon is affected by the morose old age of Chateaubriand." [2] Herself slowly ageing, she tried the effect of literary distractions. As soon as an author published a book or even a newspaper article which was talked about she immediately served him up hot for the pleasure of her illustrious friend. Thus she was able to animate a surfeited existence with the semblance of interest.

Amongst the eminent men of this time incontestably the greatest was Balzac. This young writer was the subject of much gossip. He could be met in the salons of the old Madame Sophie Gay, her daughter Madame de Girardin, that waif of the Directory Madame Hamelin, that other waif of the Empire the Duchesse d'Abrantès, the Comtesse Merlin—a Spanish creole who had married one of Napoleon's generals, and the Duchesse de Castries, who can be easily recognised under the features of Madame de Rochefide, the unsympathetic heroine of his superb novel *Béatrix*. Balzac asked nothing better than the society of the Parisian salons. His novels were of a genre absolutely fresh to French literature. No other author had ever given such a real intensity of life to fictitious characters, and never had the souls of women been so scrutinised. He studied the most secret movements of their hearts, revealed the undercurrents of their passions and their vices, and finally encircled the picture in a frame as minutely executed as the rest of the composition. The young master had ardent friends, but he had yet more ardent enemies. The fanatics of routine and mediocrity are always more numerous than the enthusiasts for progress and talent.

[1] Balzac left Paris on August 22, 1832, for Aix-les-Bains, where he was to meet the Duchesse de Castries.

[2] Vicomtesse d'Agoult, *Mes souvenirs*, p. 338.

In 1831 Balzac wrote the *Peau de chagrin*, which, in spite of some errors, remains a masterpiece of true observation. It is a finely constructed novel, and created considerable discussion before it was finished.[1] "Your nephew must have told you," wrote the novelist to his publisher Gosselin, "that I have shut myself up, and that I shall not leave the *Peau de chagrin* until it is completed. I expect a success. Madame Récamier has announced a reading, so that we shall get much praise from the Faubourg Saint-Germain."[2]

This reading probably took place, although it could not have created the fashionable excitement attached to the reading of *Moïse*. For the writer of novels a small circle was enough. Madame Récamier could not guess that posterity would place Balzac on the same plane as the author of *Les Martyrs*, and for very different and possibly higher gifts. In any case, the idea of reading the *Peau de chagrin* before Madame Récamier and her friends was an error of judgment, and Balzac must have known it. In his novel, he draws the portrait of a woman, the Comtesse Fédora, personifying egoism and "the insensibility of coquetry," as he himself admitted in an article on his own book.[3] And this woman, "without a heart, type of a heartless society," (so Philarète Chasles wrote in his *Introduction aux romans et contes philosophiques de Balzac*),[4] was to a certain extent based upon the character of Madame Récamier. Exquisite flowers of flattery did not hide cruel realities, and brutal truths. The different hypotheses of the enigmatical virtue of the heroine are examined with the freedom of a surgeon, almost, one might add, with a scalpel. Would Balzac have had the courage to carry out this autopsy, physical as well as

[1] "The impatient public was for a long while preoccupied over the appearance of this book. Some drawing-room readings had given it an immense renown before its birth." (*Revue des Deux-Mondes*, May, 1831. Cited by the Vicomte de Spœlberch de Lovenjoul in his masterly *Histoire des œuvres de Balzac*, p. 167.)

[2] *Correspondance de Balzac*, p. 89.

[3] "A young man, with a fine heart but no money, is thrown like a wisp of straw between the insensibility of coquetry and the real passion of the woman." *Histoire des œuvres de Balzac*, p. 168.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

psychological, before the woman who had inspired him? It can hardly be admitted. Perhaps in reading his manuscript he omitted the character.

Even without Fédora, the *Peau de chagrin* must have made an extremely bad impression in the circle of the Abbaye-aux-Bois. There is no mention of the reading in the *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier.* The name of Balzac is not referred to once, although it was famous. If the novel was read at the Abbaye-aux-Bois we must not be astonished at the lack of enthusiasm. It recalled to Madame Récamier and Chateaubriand, both sexagenarians, that their "*peau de chagrin*"—in other words, the little life remaining to them—was shrinking day by day. Perhaps the idea of the reading was nothing else but a figment of Balzac's imagination. This was the opinion of the Vicomte de Spœlberch de Lovenjoul, who told me that the character of Fédora was compounded of several personalities, amongst others of Olympe Pélissier, later Madame Rossini, one of the best known ladies of gallantry during the reign of Louis Philippe. The vicomte did not believe that Madame Récamier served as Balzac's model, although several characteristics had been borrowed from her. "I saw a woman of about twenty-two, of middle-size, clothed in white, surrounded by a circle of men, couched rather than seated on a sofa . . . There was a lack of modesty, an insolence, a coquetry beyond measure, in allowing us to gaze on this throne of love. She gave herself to none, but permitted all to leave their cards . . . Are you so certain of her virtue? The most audacious of our masters, and even the cleverest, admit having shipwrecked themselves near her. Yet they love her still, and remain her most devoted friends." He speaks of Fédora's "menagerie of scientists." "She gave herself to none, in order to keep all. A woman is a coquette so long as she does not love. . . . Relatively to the other subject of your species you are a phenomenon. Let us try in good faith to discover the reason of this psychological anomaly. There are many other women proud of themselves, in love with their perfections, with

feelings of refined egotism, which make them take horror at the thought of belonging to a man, of abdicating their right to free will, and submitting to a conventional superiority. Are you the same ? You seem to me a thousand times more beautiful. Did love treat you badly the first time ? Perhaps the value you attach to your elegant waist, and your delicious shape, makes you fear the havoc of motherhood ? Is this the secret reason why you refuse too deep a love ? " Balzac alludes pointedly to Madame Récamier's case. " Have you imperfections which make you virtuous in spite of yourself ? Do not be angry. I discuss, I study, I am a thousand leagues from passion. Nature, who allows the blind to be born, is well able to create women who are deaf, dumb, and blind, in love."

" She listened to me, allowing her lips to retain their habitual smile, this smile which she wore like a dress, always the same for friends, for simple acquaintances, and for strangers. . . . She threw me her banal smile, the detestable smile of a marble statue, which appeared to convey love, but remained cold. . . ."

Art has the absolute and sacred right to take from living and contemporary life what it wants. Goethe, in his *Werther,* has done nothing else. Balzac did not transgress in portraying Madame Récamier in a novel. He had used as models George Sand, Madame de Berny, the Duchesse de Castries, the Duchesse d'Abrantès, and even her eldest daughter. Perhaps in his portraiture of Fédora there was something more than a study—let us say an act of revenge. Some words make us suspect it. Artists often revenge themselves in this manner. Under the Consulate, Girodet painted Madame Lange in a bizarre clothing and attitude. Then he exhibited the picture at the salon, where every one recognised the lady. This was his revenge because she would not pay the agreed price for a portrait she had commissioned. Later Horace Vernet represented one of the princes of finance, with whom he had disagreed, as a money-lender in his large composition of the *Prise de la Smalah d'Abd el-Kader.* But what was the reason for Balzac's

revenge? Had Madame Récamier offended him? Had she countermanded the reading of his novel, or simply listened to it without enthusiasm, so that the injured author had afterwards accentuated the character of Fédora after the character of Juliette? Perhaps he had sought to be admitted into the circle of the Abbaye-aux-Bois, and had been repulsed? I do not know. Monsieur de Lovenjoul believed that Balzac's announcement of the forthcoming reading before Madame Récamier was simply written to dazzle his publisher with the expectation of great success for the book. He recognised that the novelist was ready to play such tricks.

Balzac's books were not of a kind to please Madame Récamier. They contained too much life, too much vigour, too much truth. With all her conventionalities these books crushed her. She admired the novels of Paul de Kock, with his stories of the petty passions of the little world of the lower middle-class. Chateaubriand himself brought her Paul de Kock's *Monsieur Dupont*. She read it with much pleasure, and the author obtained her admiring praise. She declared that no other book had diverted her so much.

## CHAPTER XI

MADAME RECAMIER continued to attract all the celebrities of the hour to her drawing-room, partly to amuse "the unamusable" Chateaubriand, and procure for him distractions that she herself was no longer able to give, partly to preserve the glory of her salon. Amongst those who visited the Abbaye-aux-Bois were General Lafayette, and—in default of Casimir Périer, who refused to yield to her blandishments—Auguste Périer, his elder brother. Through her the new monarchy tried to muzzle Chateaubriand. Monsieur de Montesquiou came on behalf of Louis Philippe to attempt a negotiation but he had no success. The old warrior preferred to retain his freedom. Without a doubt Madame Récamier regretted his attitude. She remained faithful to the system she had inaugurated in her youth in the interests of her husband's business. She continued to surround herself with men of influence in order to secure her own position. This necessitated a large, open, tolerant and liberal spirit. It also entailed a marked egotism that lacked principle, and sacrificed everything to herself and the fame of her salon. She forgot her legitimist convictions, Mathieu was dead, and Adrien in Normandy, so that she might still be able to boast that the most remarkable men of the day disputed the honour of laying their homage at her feet. She sought their company to make use of their power, and, by begging gifts for her friends and relations, preserved her own influence. Religious differences were no more allowed to stand in her way than political antagonisms. It would have been well if she had possessed a truly liberal spirit, but such was

not the case. That she might not be accused of being in pact with the Government and the men of July, she received at this period the Marquis de Vérac, the Duc and Duchesse de Mouchy, and the Duc de Noailles, who had been presented to her at Rome, and who brought his wife. But the duke had a reason for his visits, as will be seen later, and came more for his own sake than for hers. Thanks to these new recruits, Madame Récamier, to her delight, was able to preserve in her drawing-room a highly aristocratic atmosphere. She had always clung to the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

These newcomers did not put an end to the nightly literary gatherings. Ballanche, who acted as one of her "beaters," brought one day a rare piece of game, the Abbé de Lamennais. This was not done to please Chateaubriand. These two Bretons had been born in the same street in Saint Malo. Very ceremoniously they addressed each other as "Monsieur the Vicomte," and "Monsieur the Abbé," but there was no cordiality or sympathy. Later, however, they became friends. Madame Récamier welcomed Lamennais because he was another remarkable subject for her collection. Ballanche, who felt no malice, was delighted at the find. This Abbé, with his pale face expressive of suffering,[1] as sombre as an inquisitor under Philip II., became a partner in the interminable discussions over neo-democratic and neo-christian philosophies, for Ballanche rarely found any one to talk with him on his pet subjects. As a philosopher he was far from entertaining.

Madame Récamier's life continued its daily round, always uniform, always to her taste, in the midst of a society which formed a mutual admiration circle. Suddenly she received an abrupt shock. Chateaubriand was arrested in his "solitude" in the Rue d'Enfer, accused of complicity in a plot against the state, conducted to the prefecture of

[1] Leo XII. called it "the face of a damned." See the letter from Cardinal Bernetti to the Duc Adrien de Laval-Montmorency, Rome, August 30, 1824. *Correspondance de Lamennais*, Vol. I., p. 184.

police, and there incarcerated. His wife, as well as his old friend, visited him in prison.

The whole of the colony of the Abbaye-aux-Bois proceeded in pilgrimage to the prefecture. Monsieur Gisquet, the prefect, asked his prisoner to enter his own apartments. Chateaubriand amiably agreed, and Mademoiselle Gisquet entertained him with music. It was not without a certain regret that at the end of about a fortnight, he learned that a decree of non-committal restored him to liberty and to Madame Récamier. Again she enjoyed tranquillity, but not for long. A terrible epidemic of cholera swept through the city. She had always lived in a particular horror of this plague, and all repose of spirit vanished. A vague instinct warned her that one day she would be struck down by the disease. As the quarter of the Rue de Sèvres seemed more infected than any other, Madame Récamier quitted the Abbaye-aux-Bois, and found refuge in the Rue de la Paix with Madame Salvage, a friend of Queen Hortense, whom she had known in Italy.

During this epidemic, the Duc de Noailles visited Madame Récamier constantly. Seven years had elapsed since he had been presented to her, and although many of his relations and friends were in the circle, he had never dreamed of profiting by her invitations. Suddenly he became assiduous in his attendance. His reason could hardly have been to reassure her, or to lend her his moral support through this period of public sickness and apprehension. The duke was not thinking of the epidemic. He had realised that he possessed a certain knowledge of history and literary matters, and at the same time he remembered that Madame Récamier was responsible for the election of Mathieu de Montmorency to the Académie Française. If the cholera emptied some of the seats amongst the Forty, perhaps she might render a similar service to him, for a Noailles was as good as a Montmorency. If the Académie absolutely demanded literary qualifications he could surmount the difficulty. The traditions of his family, and the archives of his château at Maintenon, contained a thousand interesting

facts concerning the royal college at Saint Cyr, and its illustrious founder Madame de Maintenon. It was his duty as head of the house of Noailles to publish the true character of the woman who was the last passion of Louis XIV. With a little time, and a little assistance, he could soon perform his task. His friends would do the rest. But first he must become known in the world of letters. Under Madame Récamier's roof he daily met Chateaubriand, who controlled the rain and the sunshine of the Académie ; Ballanche, who did not hesitate to carry to the same sacred spot his philosophic and poetic dreams ; Ampère, with his hobbling gait, and his wit as active as his step ; Brifaut, a parasite in the rich mansions of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, whose spoken and printed platitudes were soon to be worth an armchair under the dome of the Palais Mazarin. In short, the duke found the whole literary clan, and he was clever enough to flatter their vanities to gain their favour. This was the reason why the noble duke began to frequent the rooms of Chateaubriand's middle-class friend. The action was undignified, perhaps, but the Montmorencys had done the same thing before him. He had need of her. On her side, she was happy to find the place in her salon left vacant by a Montmorency now occupied by a Noailles.

The plague abated, and, as Chateaubriand was about to take a rest in Switzerland, Madame Récamier decided to join him. She commenced by going to the Château d'Arenenberg, where Queen Hortense passed her leisure after the fall of Napoleon. Chateaubriand found Madame Récamier at Constance, the nearest town. They passed together a happy time which the great author has immortalised in his *Mémoires*.[1] " In the dilapidated town of Constance, our inn was very gay. Preparations for a marriage feast were in progress. The day after my arrival Madame Récamier wished to escape the joy of our hosts. We embarked on the lake, and, crossing the sheet of water

[1] Chateaubriand. *Mémoires d'outre tombe*, Vol. V., pp. 573-579. See also a reference in *Correspondance et souvenirs*, A. M. Ampère and J. J. Ampère, Vol. II., p. 47.

*Photo: Levy*

HORTENSE DE BEAUHARNAIS
*After the portrait by Prudhon in the Chartres Museum*

where the Rhine becomes a river, we reached the banks of a park.

" Having landed, we walked through a thicket of willows. On the other side we found a gravelled path which led through groves of shrubs, trees, and lawns. A summer-house stood in the midst of the gardens, and an elegant villa was flanked by the massed foliage of a wood. On the grass I saw some saffron, which made me feel melancholy as I remembered the autumns of my past. We walked about at random, and finally sat on a seat at the edge of the water. From the summer-house in the grove floated the harmony of harp and horn. When, charmed and surprised, we began to listen, it suddenly ended. The scene was a fairyland. The harmonies did not recommence, and I read to Madame Récamier my description of the Saint Gothard. She begged me to write something on her tablets, already half filled with details of the death of J. J. Rousseau. Below the last words of the author of *Héloïse* : ' My wife, open the window, that I may see the sun again,' I wrote the following words in pencil.

" ' What I wanted on the Lake of Lucerne I found on the Lake of Constance ; the charm and the intelligence of beauty. I do not wish to die like Rousseau. I want to see the sun for long, if I am to end my life by you. Let my days fade away at your feet, like those waves whose murmur you love.—August 28, 1832.'

" The azure tints of the lake kept watch behind the foliage. In the south the horizon gathered together the peaks of the Grison Alps. A breeze, passing through the willows, harmonised with the rise and fall of the waves. We saw no one. We did not know where we were.

" In returning to Constance we met Madame la Duchesse de Saint Leu, and her son, Louis Napoleon.[1] They were going to call upon Madame Récamier." She was offered hospitality in the little château of Wolfsberg, inhabited by a retired captain of the *chasseurs* belonging to the Imperial

[1] Afterwards Napoleon III.

Guard. Monsieur Parquin[1] was the husband of Mademoiselle Cochelet,[2] reader to Queen Hortense. The château was half an hour's distance from Arenenberg, the residence of Josephine's daughter. On August 29, Madame Récamier and Chateaubriand dined at Arenenberg. Upon rising from table, the Queen sang some romances of her own composition, read several extracts from her memoirs, and showed them a cabinet full of relics of Napoleon.

Chateaubriand conducted Madame Récamier back to Wolfsberg, and left the same night to rejoin his wife at Lucerne. Together they went to Geneva, where Madame Récamier found them. From that city they made a pious pilgrimage to Coppet. "Madame Récamier," wrote Chateaubriand,[3] "recognised all the spots, where she still seemed to see her friend, seated at her piano, coming in, going out, talking on the terrace beside the gallery. She has again seen the room she used to inhabit. Bygone days have come back to her memory. . . . From the house we entered the park. The early autumn commenced to turn and loosen the leaves. The wind gradually fell, and allowed us to listen to the stream which runs through the mill. After following the paths she had formerly walked in with Madame de Staël, Madame Récamier wished to pay a salute to her friend's ashes. At some distance from the park is a coppice, with larger trees interspersed, and shut in by a damp and dilapidated wall. . . . I did not go into the wood. Madame Récamier alone obtained permission to enter. . . Pale and in tears, Madame Récamier came from the funeral grove, herself like a shadow. . . . The same evening, the day after my act of devotion to the dead of Coppet, tired of the banks of the lake, I went in company with Madame Récamier to find less frequented walks. . . . Several times we climbed and descended, talking in the meanwhile, and

[1] He wrote an interesting book, *Souvenirs et campagnes d'un vieux soldat de l'Empire.*

[2] She also left some memoirs in several volumes.

[3] Chateaubriand. *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, Vol. V., pp. 585-592.

crossing the narrow strip of grass which separates the noisy stream from the silent hills. . . . We spoke of the days, always painful and always regretted, when the happiness and the martyrdom of youth were formed by passion. . . . Madame Récamier is going to leave us. She will return in the spring, and I shall pass the winter conjuring up my vanished hours."

Madame Récamier did not return to climb her staircase in the Abbaye-aux-Bois until October. The epidemic of cholera had passed. The new Government appeared to gather strength. The presence of the Duc de Broglie and Monsieur Guizot in the ministry gave some guarantees to the liberals. To Monsieur Lenormant it gave even more, for at the desire of Madame de Stael's son-in-law, Monsieur Guizot nominated Monsieur Lenormant to the post of assistant-curator in the department of medals at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Madame Récamier did not forget her niece's husband. The position she obtained for him was the more advantageous because it carried in its emoluments a set of apartments in the museum buildings. Lenormant knew how to make the most of his friendship with Madame Récamier. And so did his wife.[1]

Madame Récamier had hardly obtained this favour when Chateaubriand arrived. At Geneva Monsieur Berryer told him of the arrest of the Duchesse de Berri.[2] He immedi-

[1] "Madame X—— (read Lenormant), and most of those who encircled Madame Récamier profited from her friendship in every manner." (Madame Mohl to J. J. Ampère. O'Meara: *Un salon de Paris*, p. 149.) This is true, but Madame Récamier loved to oblige her friends, which was one way of maintaining her influence.

[2] Caroline Ferdinande Louis of Naples (1798-1870), daughter of the King of the two Sicilies, married Charles, Duc de Berri, eldest surviving son of the Comte d'Artois, afterwards Charles X. The Duc de Berri was assassinated February 13, 1820, and on September 29, his widow gave birth to Henri, Duc de Bordeaux, better known as the Comte de Chambord. When Charles X. fled, she also went into exile, but in 1832 she returned to France and raised a revolt on behalf of her son in La Vendée and Brittany. Defeated and captured, it was discovered that she had contracted a secret marriage with an Italian nobleman, which robbed her of the support of the monarchical party. She was released in 1833, and returned to her husband in Italy.

ately came to Paris and placed himself at the disposal of the princess, soliciting the honour of being appointed her defender. He wrote the *Mémoire sur la captivité de Madame la Duchesse de Berri*, in which occurred the celebrated words, "Madame, your son is my King!" This phrase was considered seditious, and he was tried before the court of assizes, but the jury acquitted him.

When she heard of this devotion, the Duchesse de Berri wrote to Chateaubriand begging him to go to Prague to inform her father-in-law, Charles X., that she had been secretly married in Italy to the Comte Hector Lucchesi-Palli. No mission was more to his taste. Besides, the month was May, and, as he wrote from Basle to Madame Récamier, "travelling always gives me strength, feeling, and thought."

His duty fulfilled, he quickly returned to the side of the woman who had taken so important a place in his life. He was delighted to pick up his old habits, and to resume his place in the chosen society of the Abbaye-aux-Bois. His leisure was soon interrupted. The Duchesse de Berri sent him a fresh letter calling him to Italy. He was hardly in the humour to take to the road again, but he could not refuse the Princess, and was soon away.

As usual, from each resting place on the journey, a letter was despatched to the Abbaye-aux-Bois. It has already been remarked that these letters were charming. Take for example those written in Venice, amidst an enchanting atmosphere he has depicted so well in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*. "Byron wished to pass long years here. I would voluntarily end my life here, if you would join me. . . . I place at your feet the most beautiful dawn in the world. It lights up the paper on which I am writing." And from Ferrara he wrote: "Pray for me. Perhaps I shall find at Venice a few lines from you, before quitting a city where I would like to live in exile with you." And it is a septuagenarian who wrote these tender gallantries to a sexagenarian. However, on the same day that he wrote these pretty words to Madame Récamier he set down amongst his private

notes: "I am not able to see a ship without dying of envy at not being able to go in it. If I were free the first vessel sailing for the Indies would have the chance of carrying me." In writing these words he forgot Madame Récamier.

The Duchess de Berri came to Ferrara. She spoke of business at once to Chateaubriand, and declared that she would take him to Prague. He had to submit. He informed Madame Récamier, and wrote to her during the journey, from Ferrara on September 19, from Padua on the 20th, from Willach in Carinthia on the 22nd, from Prague on the 29th. He said many fine things. "On the 12th of next month, I shall be back again in our little society, our habits, our work, and with you, whom absence always renders me fonder and more impatient to meet afresh."[1]

In Paris, his remarks were as interesting, but of a different character. He had studied more closely the exiled royal family, and, though a fervent royalist, was far from being enthusiastic. "I can do no more for those people," he wrote to Madame Récamier, proudly, but with bitter disdain. "The young men who went to pay their compliments to Henri[2] were received like dogs." Disgusted with princes, Chateaubriand forgot the loss of his illusions in work, and found tranquillity in the lukewarm solemnity of Madame Récamier's salon. Their day would have been lost if they had not passed a couple of hours together each afternoon. Madame Récamier was entirely absorbed by her friend, not because he was like a querulous patient, and did not wish to be left alone for a second, but because she had given him all the attachment and devotion of which she was capable. Chateaubriand became her life, her entire existence. A real affection had grafted itself on all her little vanities.

Her desire to see him enter her rooms became an actual need. However, she had nothing to fear on this account. Not one single day did Chateaubriand miss receiving his

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Recamier*, Vol. II., p. 435.

[2] Duc de Bordeaux, son of the Duchesse de Berri, later known as the Comte de Chambord and—by the Legitimists—Henri V.

cup of tea and his dole of incense. No revolution could change that habit.

A new reason now confirmed his daily custom. He had finished writing his *Mémoires*, and it was fitting that he should read extracts from it to Madame Récamier and some of her chosen friends. One evening in February, 1834, the reading commenced. It was a great but very intimate gathering in the salon of the Abbaye-aux-Bois, and it brought much glory to the lady of the house. As at the reading of *Moïse*, there were representatives from the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and the world of letters. The number was limited, about a dozen in all. One of the privileged listeners, Léonce de Lavergne, has written an account of this evening, but it is told with such exaggeration as to render quotation impossible. Sainte-Beuve gives in a simpler and more pleasant style the impression he received at the first recital of the *Mémoires* in Madame Récamier's drawing-room. "In this narrow room, so small, and yet so nobly filled that I felt proud of being included in such a chosen circle, it was impossible during the intervals of the reading, or even whilst the reading was going on, not to fall into reminiscence. The great picture which lit up the end of the wall represented Corinne. Thus the remembrance of a glorious friendship filled and illumined a whole life. Opposite the portrait was a branch of green foliage, ash, perhaps, or oak,[1] placed on the chimney-piece amidst Grecian vases and other ornaments, a souvenir of the hours which had fled, a symbol of the immortality which deceives the flight of time." [2]

The wearisome experience of *Moïse* was not repeated on this occasion. Chateaubriand did not need an actor to read his manuscript. The recital was allotted to two friends, Ampère and Lenormant. The old athlete sat in

[1] Without doubt in pious souvenir of Madame de Staël, who was in the habit of playing whilst in her salon, at the table, or in her carriage, with a little spray of green leaves. Madame Récamier had placed such a branch in front of the portrait of her friend.

[2] Sainte-Beuve. *Portraits contemporains*, Vol. I. Portrait of Chateaubriand. It was written in 1834.

his usual armchair by the side of the fireplace, facing Madame Récamier's solemn smiles, and listening to the reading of these pages as if he knew nothing about them and was not the author. So long-winded a work could not be completed in one evening. There was much to be gone through before the end was reached, and the triumph of the great writer fully achieved. Every one agreed that Chateaubriand had never written better or with more life.

Madame Récamier was not forgotten in these memoirs, and Chateaubriand had enough gallantry to remark that the memoirs " were improved by the story of Madame Récamier's life." Madame Récamier thought that he spoke too much about her, using terms which at least aroused retrospective scruples. It was hard for her to ask the author to suppress passages she could hardly approve. The Directory had long since ceased to exist, and her youth was over. It also troubled her that certain intimate details, which concerned her alone, and which are certainly those which most interest every one else, should be revealed to the curiosity of coming generations. Besides, she had become devout. Her friends were a trifle embarrassed, and could not explain their reasons clearly, but, with some difficulty, made it known that certain passages should be suppressed, even if Chateaubriand's heart bled from the amputation.

Monsieur d'Haussonville tells us what took place. " Madame Récamier was friendly with one of my mother's friends, Madame Letissier, whose husband had been a deputy under the Restoration and a very zealous partisan of Monsieur de Villèle's ministry. She was a woman of much merit and tact, not lacking in literary taste, and receiving in her salon many of the literary celebrities of the time, amongst others Monsieur Ballanche and Monsieur de Lamartine. Before all, she was a woman of the world, moving in the best circles. Monsieur de Chateaubriand's friend asked Madame Letissier whether, in the manuscript sheets the author had been reading, there were not some passages it would be advisable to ask him to sacrifice. The question was delicate to decide. Madame Letissier consulted the son of a deputy,

one of her husband's friends, Monsieur de Ronchaud, who was my informant. About the text of the suppressed passages his remembrance was not very exact. The only thing he recalled was that Monsieur de Chateaubriand, in speaking of his first interview with Madame Récamier, had written this sentence. "I found her languidly extended on a sofa, and, as I left her, I asked myself if I had seen a statue of modesty or of love."

"In addition, there were descriptions of evenings passed in the country on the terrace of a château, with steps leading to a dark and mysterious wood. There, out of sight, he wandered far into the night with the divine enchantress. All this was very innocent, and by no means suspicious. There was nothing of a character to compromise the immaculate legend attached to the memory of the amiable hostess of the Abbaye-aux-Bois. Perhaps the really singular part of the affair is that she thought fit to take the advice of a friend on one of those particularly intimate reserved cases which women usually prefer to decide for themselves." [1]

During the summer of 1835 Madame Récamier went to Dieppe. Always shut up in the Abbaye-aux-Bois, in drawing-rooms or in carriages, never taking exercise, she found her health needed the bracing air of the coast. "I am pleased to hear," Chateaubriand wrote to her, "that you are breathing the sea breezes. And as I picture your life, it seems to me that they also do me good—at fifty leagues distance." [2]

Returning from Dieppe, Madame Récamier stopped with her niece at Chapelle-Saint-Eloi. Then the whole colony of the Abbaye-aux-Bois gathered together at the Château de Maintenon, where the Duc de Noailles had invited them. His hospitality was cordial and princely. The noble duke, who had his schemes to advance, conciliated his guests with the refinements of an exquisite courtesy. Madame Récamier's vanity was touched. To continue her enjoyment, when she left Noailles, she was received at the Château de

[1] Comte d'Haussonville. *Ma jeunesse*, p. 171.
[2] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. II., p. 443.

Montigny by Adrien de Montmorency, Duc de Laval, who had more than once given her an invitation. He was her oldest friend, and, under the Directory, had been the first man of title to enter her salon. With the help of his cousin Mathieu, he had directed her political indecision towards monarchist ideas. She did well to meet this old acquaintance. Eight months later Death carried him away from the pleasures of his beautiful retreat.

Amongst the well-known men—and she cared only to receive celebrities—who were presented at this time to Madame Récamier was Alexis de Tocqueville, one of Chateaubriand's relations. He owed the honour to the success of his book on *La démocratie en Amérique*. Once admitted to the salon of this illustrious woman he was able to study her closely, and without prejudices or the illusions of a lover. Madame Virginie Ancelot was invited at the same time. Several plays written by her had been presented at the Comédie Française, and this fact gave her a certain celebrity. So she also was ticketed in the collection of the Abbaye-aux-Bois. In her *Foyers éteints* and *Un salon de Paris* she devoted several pages to Madame Récamier, and they contain less honey than vinegar. Throwing aside prejudice and convention, Madame Ancelot saw things as they were, and wrote the truth. Monsieur de Tocqueville said: "No one is better able to paint Madame Récamier than you, and no one can penetrate so profoundly into the labyrinth of her diplomacies. Only a woman can understand fully this very feminine genius. The cleverest of us is a fool in such a manner. But, if I recognise that there is a depth of little passions in Madame Récamier, and an artifice that approaches art, you must remember that she has a true taste for intelligence, and a great devotion to her friends." [1]

She certainly was faithful to her friends. As she surrounded herself only with men whose brilliance was reflected upon her, men she had need of for her protégés, there was no great merit in abandoning them, particularly as she gave

[1] Letter from Monsieur de Tocqueville to Madame Ancelot, December 8, 1857. *Un salon de Paris*, p. 87.

herself an immense amount of trouble to attract them to her salon. Monsieur de Tocqueville was too gallant a man not to burn incense to such a lady, but Madame Ancelot was not restrained by such an excess of chivalry. The following passage is an example.

"For a long while I have watched the cleverness with which Madame Récamier was able to bring others to submit to her will. This vanity, which never forgot itself, was a curious study. . . . When her project was to attract to her house a distinguished man she sought the help of women, children, friends, acquaintances. . . . Her single aim was to succeed."

Madame Ancelot then relates at length one of Madame Récamier's intrigues to bring into her circle a man in the most eminent political position. He had a country house at Auteuil, where, during the summer, he could escape from the fatigues of the political world, and enjoy pure air and solitude after a laborious day.

Madame Récamier hired a small and ugly house without a garden by the side of the more splendid dwelling, and asked permission to walk in the park. The favour granted, she promenaded incessantly, feasted the sister-in-law who kept the politician's house, and played with the children. Every resource was exhausted, but the minister was not enticed into the armchair which confronted Chateaubriand's in the drawing-room of the Abbaye-aux-Bois. He remained polite, but inflexible. Madame Récamier returned to Paris unsuccessful in her attempt.[1]

A comparison between Madame Ancelot and Madame Lenormant produces astonishing results. The actions of a person like Madame Récamier can be judged in several ways. Madame Lenormant's volumes reflect her life from but one side. They give us Madame Récamier in state dress, with her smile of command, and her official mask. Read the remarks of a keen-witted man who was introduced to the mistress of the Abbaye-aux-Bois about this time, and who read Madame Lenormant's books. "In

[1] Madame Ancelot, *Foyers éteints*, pp. 172-175.

these *Souvenirs* as in these salons, in these *Mémoires* as in these relationships, all was artificial. The gauze of Isabey's pastels floated across everything. I knew Madame Lenormant, and, to a lesser extent, Madame Récamier. I have seen them both. Their drawing-rooms were oppressive. Coquetry and insipidity were their platitudes. Madame Récamier's salon was better than that of Madame Lenormant. A religious and bigoted worship of monarchism was affected, and the majestic shade of Chateaubriand dominated all. He sat in a corner like a living idol on an altar. To some degree, the atmosphere was freshened by invigorating breezes of passion and energy, which the long-past Directory and Empire had left behind." [1]

[1] Philarète Chasles, *Mémoires*, Vol. I., p. 318.

## CHAPTER XII

MADAME RECAMIER'S life was now calm and peaceful. The only events which broke its monotony were the literary re-unions that she gave from time to time when a book created some stir or a new play achieved success, but these gatherings were held more to relieve her continual ennui than to maintain the reputation of her salon. She was not of the same mind as Madame de Créqui, who told Sénac de Meilhan that the world pleased her no longer, that she could not bear it, that "every day she found it more stupid." On the contrary, Madame Récamier continued to receive every newcomer in the world of celebrities according to her old plans. In spite of these visitors her evenings were far from amusing. Chateaubriand, as he grew old, did not become less rugged, and his friend could have repeated the words of Madame de Maintenon, during the last years of Louis XIV. : "What a torture to have to amuse a man who can no longer be amused." Monsieur de Rémusat, according to Talleyrand, in his position as chamberlain to the Emperor, also knew the torture of amusing the unamusable. But this torment became one of Madame Récamier's habits, and, as it flattered her vanity, gave her a supreme joy. Yet the wearied attitude of Chateaubriand permeated the whole salon like a heavy vapour. Madame Récamier's stereotyped smiles were of little avail. They were not natural. Youth was wanting, and she had grown old in her eternal white robe.

These drawbacks did not prevent her from forming in the autumn of her life a literary group which must take its

place in the history of the intellectual movement of the nineteenth century. Sainte-Beuve assiduously frequented her salon.[1] He had been introduced by Mérimée, and he tells us [2] that, when being taken to the Abbaye-aux-Bois, he feared losing his freedom as a critic. He did not wish to leave in Madame Récamier's salon the liberty of his pen. He declares that from that moment he could never freely speak in public of Chateaubriand. "An amiable influence has altogether paralysed me on this subject, and has robbed my pen of judgment, properly so called." Sainte-Beuve makes a mistake. He has spoken more than freely of Chateaubriand, against whom he had (we know not why) [3] a bitterness that he did not seek to disguise. And there was a little hypocrisy in what he added respecting Madame Récamier: "But so sweet a charm attracted me towards this gracious woman, who had consecrated herself to the ageing René, that I definitely capitulated and became as all those she had conquered." In reality he acted as the too complaisant echo of the hatreds and jealousies of Monsieur Molé, Madame Hortense Allart,[4] and the malignities of Madame de Boigne. In fact, he cried down the illustrious author of *Les Martyrs*. He offered the customary incense to Madame Récamier, less perhaps for the sake of friendship or from goodness of heart than because it was the fashion.

[1] "I go to the Abbaye two or three times a week." Sainte-Beuve to J. J. Ampère, December 18, 1834. (Ampère, *Correspondance et souvenirs*, Vol. II., p. 69.)

[2] *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, Vol. I., p. 17.

[3] Or rather we know well enough. It is because Chateaubriand had given him but a few lines in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, and those only in a note. "I thank the ingenious Monsieur Sainte-Beuve for the trouble he has taken for me." Evidently, by the side of the incense he lavished on Madame Récamier this is meagre. However, there was no reason for Sainte-Beuve to revenge himself, as he did, by the somewhat inexact revelations which appear in the second volume of his fine work on *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*.

[4] Under the pseudonym of Madame de Saman she wrote a book with a bizarre title, *Les enchantements de Prudence*, in which she tells the story of her own enchantments, when she became for a very short while at Rome, in 1829, the mistress of Chateaubriand. See on this subject, Comte d'Haussonville, *Ma jeunesse*, pp. 190-192.

Beneath the velvet paw of the man of the world we feel the claws of the critic.

Monsieur Lenormant was always ready to display his eloquence. In the drawing-room, in the dining-room, in the hall, in the most intimate *causerie*, he talked as if he were in his professional chair. He did not perceive that no one listened to him, but contributed actively, though not silently, to the solemn ennui which reigned in Madame Récamier's salon. No man was ever so happy in wearying others. Never have people taken so much pleasure in allowing themselves to be bored. Monsieur Lenormant was a good courtier, and consequently a great man.

In this gloom Ampère's smiling nature and witty conversation discreetly brightened an atmosphere of pedantry and mortal weariness of spirit. Though a professor, he was amiable and attractive. Without him these re-unions would have been impossible, for Miss Mary Clarke was no longer present to enliven the room with her charm. During the twenty years Ampère had frequented the house his nature had slowly changed. He was extinguished by the atmosphere of a salon which was half a cathedral, half a mortuary. He became mummified. Mérimée described him as being a man of a very passionate temperament, " very capricious and very eccentric." Little by little Madame Récamier influenced him until he became " soft, polished, benignant, and mediocre—like every one else." [1] Madame Récamier had provoked poor Ampère's declaration of love, without reciprocating his affection. As

[1] Mérimée's reflection is quite just. Compare the letters of J. J. Ampère to his friends with those he wrote to Madame Récamier. In one we find *brio* and unlimited wit ; in the other the conventionality of the drawing-room. Madame Lenormant also unconsciously recognised it when she wrote : " Ampère was never more amiable than on an excursion," and speaks of his verve and good humour. The reason was that he no longer carried the leaden mantle of conventionality imposed by the presence of Madame Récamier. Liberated from all restraint, he became himself, and enjoyed the delights of deliverance and freedom. (See André-Marie Ampère and Jean-Jacques Ampère, *Correspondance et souvenirs*, from 1825 to 1864.)

he could do no better, he became her friend, her reader, then her secretary.

Of this community Ballanche took the lead. His manner was truly called pontifical.[1] His unctuous attitudes were those of an arch-priest. His supreme ugliness, to which an inexpressible air of beatitude lent a charm, lit up the twilight of the salon. He might have been an old servant who had by degrees risen in grade. Madame Michelet told me in the last year of her life (and she had the remark from her husband) that the philosopher of the Abbaye-aux-Bois knelt and bowed too much in front of the two idols of the house. Faithful friend and Achates of Chateaubriand (who sometimes treated him rather brusquely), he was also the cavalier of honour to Madame Récamier. Pleased with the position he occupied by the side of his gracious patron, and impressed by the importance of his functions, Ballanche gave no offence. He was known as " the good Ballanche " ; Madame Récamier charged him with all her commissions, and he was quite contented, looking upon the Abbaye-aux-Bois as the centre of the world.

Some unpublished letters revealed the part Madame Récamier played in his life. In writing to the Duchesse d'Abrantès he says : " Madame la duchesse.—How can you believe that you are being forgotten ? I would certainly have called upon you with news of Madame Récamier, but I find myself in a difficult situation. I intend to publish a book during the winter. Madame Récamier lives in the Rue d'Anjou,[1] and I am always in the Rue de Sèvres. You can understand that the distance between these houses robs me of the time I could have wished to devote to several persons. I would have written to you, but, from day to day, I hoped to do better. Besides, the first days of Madame Récamier's installation were painful, not because of her new dwelling, which is quite perfect for her state of health,

[1] There is little time nowadays to plunge into the works of Ballanche, but we can read the causeries which have been devoted to him. Sainte-Beuve, *Portraits contemporains* (Vol. II.), and Emile Faguet, *Politiques et moralistes.*

but because of her health itself. You need not doubt, Madame la duchesse, of the eagerness with which she would have acquainted you of her arrival, being persuaded that you, on your part, had a great desire to see her. . . . But her sufferings left her few intervals, and it was impossible to foresee the attacks."

In another letter dated a year later (November 3, 1838), Ballanche writes on behalf of his mistress:

"Dear Monsieur Fauriel: Madame Rècamier has not had the pleasure of seeing you for an eternity. She complains, and so do I, for I sometimes profit from your visits. She commissions me to engage you for some moments during her soirée next Sunday, and she will be happy if you are free on that day. Usually, she is always at home on Thursday and Sunday evenings." [1]

After having passed the winter in Baron Pasquier's house,[2] Madame Récamier, whose health was apparently not restored, although she took pleasure in entertaining her friends, settled down at Chatenay, near Paris, under the roof of Madame de Boigne. It was not far from the Vallée-aux-Loups, which, since the death of Mathieu de Montmorency, had passed to his daughter, the Vicomtesse de la Rochefoucauld. It was also not far from Aulnay, where Monsieur de la Touche had his hermitage. Thus it became the centre of a society in which she was well known. These friends met every Sunday round the table of her hostess, Madame de Boigne, who exercised a caustic wit which resembled that of Madame du Deffand, a Voltaire in petticoats. Madame Récamier met there Monsieur Pasquier, to whom she wrote every morning, and whose friendship with her lasted until the end of her life, Monsieur Decazes, Monsieur d'Argout, Monsieur Dumon, and Monsieur Sainte-Beuve, all men of letters, with moderate political opinions and much scepticism.

[1] The first letter has been lent to me by Monsieur G. Aubert. The second will be found in the Bibliothèque de l'Institut, *Fonds Fauriel*, letter No. 11.

[2] The house was pulled down in 1870. Pasquier possessed but the lease which he had bought for 20,000 francs about 1808. (Louis Favre, *Etienne Denis Pasquier, chancelier de France*, p. 130.)

A letter from Madame de Boigne to Monsieur Pasquier throws a sidelight upon Madame Récamier's days at Chatenay. "Yes, certainly I knew Professor R——, whom you had to dinner. He is one of the most wearisome men I have ever met. He came twice to Chatenay when I was there with Madame Récamier. He arrived early, and left late. The last time, not knowing what to do, Madame Récamier sent him out walking, through the wood of Verrièrs, in the beating rain for three hours, under the umbrella of Ampère. They returned so wet that it was necessary to light a fire to dry them before dinner. Madame Récamier said laughing: "This will save us for a few minutes more from the boredom of the dear professor." [1]

Thus Madame Récamier, if she had no claws, had at least a sharp tongue. But she never spoke, or even thought, in the same manner of Adrien de Montmorency, who was no more amusing than the most trying of professors. Adrien was a Montmorency! "Oh! Oh! Ah! Ah!" as Balzac would have cried. A Montmorency was always admirable.

Monsieur de Loménie, another professor, was introduced to Madame Récamier. He was not wearisome, though young. De Loménie pleased her because of his name, which recalled that of the Cardinal de Brienne, but the family was not the same. His article upon Chateaubriand in the *Galerie des contemporains illustres* had opened the doors of the Abbaye-aux-Bois. His tactics were those of the Duc de Noailles, and, in gaining admission to this antechamber of the Academy, he hoped to secure his election to the Academy itself. Frédéric Ozanam appeared but rarely at the Abbaye. The atmosphere was too stifling for his young lungs, eager for the fresh air of liberty. Ampère brought him later, and the desire to talk with the author of the *Génie du christianisme* made this neo-Catholic pass within the salon of the morose Chateaubriand.[2]

[1] Louis Favre. *Pasquier, chancelier de France*, p. 338.

[2] Perhaps he wanted Madame Récamier's patronage, for, in November, 1844, he was nominated professor at the Collège de France, to the vacant chair left by the death of Fauriel, Miss Mary Clarke's close friend.

Sainte-Beuve was attracted by his own keen wish to further his candidature for the Academy. Brifaut was more cringing than any in this little world. He was the friend of all who were rich, happy, and noble. He loved to frequent the Faubourg Saint Germain, and the words "duchesse" and "marquise" were constantly on his lips.

The salon of the Abbaye-aux-Bois is a curious feature in the literary life of the first part of the nineteenth century. Nearly every person of ambition in letters[1] or politics came out of interest, to parade before Madame Récamier, who received them out of interest. Each one sang her praises. Yet Chateaubriand was the great attraction, for they knew that he held the keys of the Academy, and to him they addressed all their flatteries, by courting Madame Récamier, the most delicate way of flattering him. Every man was a courtier. And Madame Récamier, since she had succeeded in electing Mathieu de Montmorency to the Academy, chose the candidates and influenced the elections, as, in a former age, did Madame de Lambert. Chateaubriand had a remarkable influence at the Palais Mazarin. Through regard for his genius and respect for his age, other academicians promised him support, and, oddly enough, remained faithful to their promises. Ballanche failed in 1835 against Scribe, but was the first in 1842, following the election of the Duc de Montmorency. Brifaut followed, then J. J. Ampère in 1846. The influence of Madame Récamier lasted after the death of her old friend, for the Duc de Noailles succeeded Chateaubriand. Ponsard was received five years later,[2] in 1855, but Monsieur de Loménie only in 1874. It is true that his book on *Beaumarchais et son temps* was a stronger recommendation than the remembrance

[1] "Quinet read his poem at the Abbaye." J. Mohl to J. J. Ampère, 1835. (Ampère. *Correspondance et souvenirs*, Vol. II. p. 81.)

[2] "It is said that the Abbaye-aux-Bois has some wish to push me into the Academy." Ponsard to the Duchesse Decazes, June 28, 1847—*Revue de Paris*, May 15, 1901. In other words, Ponsard was approaching Chateaubriand and Madame Récamier for their patronage.

of Madame Récamier. Sainte-Beuve was presented in 1844. He had every personal qualification, but he was clever enough to recognise that this counted for nothing if he was not also *persona grata* to the little coterie which ruled under the dome of the Institute.[1]

Having no children, Madame Récamier consoled herself by having academicians. She even made one of Charles Lenormant, her niece's husband, and conducted his candidature for the *Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*. She knew the whole science and art of life, and, under an air of ignorance, concealed an expert knowledge of how to pull the strings. Lenormant and his wife were worthy pupils.

Madame Récamier's salon was not the only one where academicians were made. Madame de Girardin also reigned over an antechamber to the Academy. She passionately loved literature, because she had succeeded in it. Her husband, without so much enthusiasm, succeeded for his part in journalism. Her salon had not so great a respect for conventionality and the past, as the Abbaye-aux-Bois. Madame de Girardin entertained Charles Nodier, Lamartine, Victor Hugo, even Prosper de Barante, who visited the Abbaye-aux-Bois out of a pious respect for Madame de Staël. Balzac was a friend of the house, or rather of the mistress of the house, for he had little sympathy with the irritating Emile de Girardin. She wished to see him an academician, but the great novelist, warned that his financial embarrassments would prove an obstacle, did not present himself for election.

During 1840, after her visit to Ems, Madame Récamier wished to make the acquaintance of Madame Ancelot. Several plays by this witty woman had been represented at the Théâtre Français, perhaps because of her talent, perhaps because her husband had been elected to the Académie Française. Now that she had become celebrated Madame

[1] "Sainte-Beuve wished to enter the Academy, and Madame Récamier was a great dispenser of the learned chairs." Auguste Barbier, *Souvenirs personnels et silhouettes contemporaines*, p. 316. Molière's remark, "Nul n'aura de l'esprit hors nous et nos amis," is for all time.

Récamier wished her to be presented. Besides, she too held a literary salon, which, like those of Madame de Girardin and the Abbaye-aux-Bois, acted as an introduction to the Academy.

At first sight Madame Ancelot was neither pretty nor witty. She had a highly developed gift of observation, and she knew the world too well to see it beautiful. Madame Récamier reproached her for her pessimism, which, however, was but a reflection of the manner in which she looked upon life. This sincerity of experience did not prevent Madame Ancelot from being charming in her friendship, with much sweetness, gaiety, good sense, and light-heartedness. These are not common qualities, but mark a personality of the highest order, and her friends knew how to appreciate them. At the Abbaye-aux-Bois, however, Madame Ancelot did not wish to shine.

Madame Amable Tastu frequently visited Madame Récamier at this period. She deserved a better word than the vulgarised epithet of "charming," which was so lavishly scattered, especially upon those who had not the slightest claim to the quality. She was an author, but not a blue-stocking. Madame Desbordes-Valmore, "her rival and sister in poetry," said Sainte-Beuve, drew her portrait in the following lines. "Madame Tastu, the model of women. . . . A pure, distinguished soul, fighting with quiet sorrow against her hard destiny. Her talent, like her virtue, has not a blemish. I love her; she suffers but never loses courage. Sweet woman, whom I would dare to call sister!" [1] In spite of all these qualities, if she had not been celebrated, she would not have been received at the Abbaye-aux-Bois. Madame Récamier's exclusive taste for celebrities, practised for almost half-a-century, dried up all the feelings of her heart to the great profit of her vanity.

Madame Eugénie Foa, something of a blue-stocking, had already been introduced at the Abbaye-aux-Bois.[2]

[1] Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*, p. 1, tables.

[2] This is the letter in which Madame Eugénie Foa asked Madame Récamier's permission to visit her. "Madame, what I am going

Madame Récamier received these ladies with her usual amiability, but it was easy to see that she preferred the conversation of men to that of women. At the moment the friendship of Sainte-Beuve interested her extremely. He was particularly a man of shadows and suggestions, according

to ask you is very difficult and very delicate. Indeed, I should not know how to set about it if I did not know that I am addressing one who is justly entitled 'The Angel of the Abbaye-aux-Bois'!

"I am dying of the desire to see you, Madame, to talk with you an instant, a single instant with you. My father, Monsieur Rodrigues, of Bordeaux, who had the advantage of your acquaintance, has spoken to me with the enthusiasm you inspire in all those who approach you.

"Will you refuse my prayer? Ah! the soul which can appreciate yours is not unworthy of this honour, I assure you. On the sad road of life, few persons are to be met with who realise your dreams of youth. When she can be found it is necessary to stand on the path to see her pass, as in winter we seek for a ray from the sun.

"That does one good.

"Understand my reasons, Madame, and if my boldness is not too great, your favour will be greater

"Believe me, Madame, your sincere admirer,

"Eugénie Foa, née Rodrigues.

"Without doubt my name is not yet celebrated enough to come to your knowledge. It is the first time that I emerge from obscurity.

"February 21, 1836. 48, Rue Saint-Lazare."

Madame Récamier evidently sent the invitation with a certain grace, for a second letter followed.

"Madame, I have received the good and charming little note you have had the kindness to write me, and now see what unhappiness has been mine. I am kept in my house by a slight illness that stops me from going out.

"All the same, I hope this week to profit from the permission which I have solicited with so much ardour, and which has been accorded me with such a delightful grace, and to see the being who honours the whole of her sex, the woman of whom nothing but good has been said, without the slightest calumny.

"Believe, me, Madame, I have never so much desired good health as to-day.

"Eugénie Foa, née Rodrigues.

"March 5, 1836.

"P.S.—I forget if it is the morning or the evening that you are visible, and I fear presenting myself at an inconvenient hour when you do not receive."

These letters have been lent to me by Baron Albert Lumbroso.

to the remark Mademoiselle de Fontanes made to Madame Lenormant.[1] Sainte-Beuve wished to please Madame Récamier. Sometimes he gave readings of his literary portraits in the little blue salon before sending them to the *Constitutional* or the *Moniteur*. Monsieur de Fontanes, Chateaubriand's old friend, died whilst the latter was ambassador at Berlin. Sainte-Beuve, always a courtier, and preparing for his candidature at the Académie Française, wrote a notice upon him based upon papers lent by Madame de Fontanes. He then read it at the Abbaye.[2] It is one of his best essays, and from that moment his name was seriously considered as worthy of a seat at the Institute. But his real candidature dates from the reading which he gave in Madame Récamier's salon, in 1839, of the first volume of his *Histoire de Port Royal*.

These grave lectures had their effect upon the tone of the salon, which became more pedantic than enjoyable. Madame Récamier's chief desire was to leave a unique reputation for intellectual superiority and distinction, and she failed to notice the gradual change.

However, from time to time, there were defections amongst the guests, and death also was busy. Melancholy permeated the letters of Chateaubriand, as well as those of Ballanche. The circle drew more closely together, as the years passed. Chateaubriand wrote to his goddess: "Every day time ravishes an eye, an ear, a hand; if it were not for your dear and beautiful person, I should not wish to linger so long under the sun." [3]

Madame Récamier's health did not improve. She tried to hide the sad fact from her friends—it would have afflicted them—but she was not able to conceal the failure of her sight. Soon it was recognised that she must undergo an operation

[1] G. Pailhès. *Du nouveau sur Joubert*, p. 433.

[2] Sainte-Beuve. *Portraits littéraires*, Vol. II., p. 207, 305. He also read at the Abbaye-aux-Bois a notice on Ballanche in 1834, one on J. J. Ampère in 1840, and one on Mérimée in 1841. They are to be found in *Portraits contemporains*.

[3] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. II., p. 499 August 10, 1840.

for cataract. She decided to take the waters at Ems. J. J. Ampère set aside a thousand engagements to accompany her, for she never went out or travelled alone. She hoped the thermal treatment would bring amelioration, but it produced no result. "I write as if with white ink, not seeing what I write," she told her niece.[1] And Ampère wrote to Alexis de Tocqueville: "Madame Récamier has returned from Ems, still suffering." [2]

However, Chateaubriand regained some of his lost youth, and in 1843 the letters he wrote from Bourbonne were gay; but his happiness did not last, and those he wrote from London, in the same year, are full of melancholy. Like all old men this wreck spoke of his youth.

The passing-bell was tolling for Prince Augustus of Prussia. The unhappy man was dead, and his executors returned to Madame Récamier her letters and the beautiful portrait by Gérard.

Some distractions lightened these sorrows. In April, 1846, J. J. Ampère presented himself as a candidate for the Institute. Since December, 1842, he had been a member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, where he had replaced Monsieur de Gérando, a friend of Madame Récamier. His rival in the election was Monsieur Vatout, the librarian to King Louis Philippe. Both the Tuileries and the Abbaye-aux-Bois exerted their forces, and the latter triumphed. "Monsieur de Chateaubriand was carried to the Academy," wrote Alfred de Vigny. "Although his limbs have lost all action, he is, he says, very pleased with his health. He came expressly to support Ampère, his protégé. His octogenarian head is more beautiful than I ever saw it in his riper age. No one witnessed his arrival as he was carried in before the others came. A kind of coquetry of old age made him fear above all to be caught in the fact of his infirmity. He was very delighted to be counted again amongst the living, and at the hope of seeing

[1] *Souvenirs et correspondance de Madame Récamier*, Vol. II., p. 211.
[2] A. M. and J. J. Ampère. *Correspondance et souvenirs*, Vol. II., p. 106.

Ampère elected. The good Ballanche was not far away, and appeared proud to see him arrive on the second floor. His great eyes have softened, and his beautiful expression has assumed an inexpressible sweetness. This favour has without doubt been given from on high in order to lessen the surprising ugliness of the wart on his left cheek, which makes it enormous." [1]

Ampère was elected. Lamartine, that "great booby," as Chateaubriand once called him, voted against Ampère, and then sent his wife to congratulate Madame Récamier on the success of her candidate.

Chateaubriand suffered from paralysis of the legs. Madame Récamier was almost blind. They continued however to meet. Life for them was nothing but a reminiscence, and they exchanged recollections when they broke the silence which enveloped them. "Every day, at three o'clock, Monsieur de Chateaubriand was carried to the bedside of Madame Récamier," wrote Victor Hugo. "It was touching and sad. The woman, who no longer could see, sought for the man who could no longer feel. Their hands met. God be thanked! They are about to die and they still love each other." [2]

In the midst of this decay, the good Ballanche remained the same. This brave heart, whose devotion to Madame Récamier is so moving, suddenly became worldly, and, acting as a missionary for his idol, went into friendly houses and chanted her litany. His refrain was the same. Madame Récamier, and always Madame Récamier. He allowed himself to be entertained by Madame de Hautefeuille, but she did not dream—as did the Noailles—of asking his vote for the Institute. Ballanche's life was patriarchal. He went to bed at an early hour. Seated near his bed, Monsieur and Madame Hautefeuille kept him company, and listened to his dreams of utopia. The good man was pleased, in his philosophy, to fraternise with the worldly aristocrats who formed the "train" of Madame Récamier. Thus the

[1] Alfred de Vigny. *Journal d'un poète*, p. 213.
[2] Victor Hugo. *Choses vues*, p. 208.

years passed with him. The letters of the various members of the little colony of the Abbaye-aux-Bois continued to be charming, but their melancholy was more and more pronounced. They remind us of the raft of the *Méduse*, where each day the shipwrecked mariners wondered whom death would select on the morrow. The colony formed a real family, and its members were very united. Madame de Chateaubriand lived in peace with Madame Récamier, and even with her husband. At an earlier period she would have preferred not to meet this intriguing lady of the middle-classes, but she had now become the intimate friend of the woman who to some extent had robbed her of her husband. Death came to her first.

A few days later Madame Récamier underwent an operation for cataract, but without success. Ballanche's true heart was tortured at the thought, and it was he who died of the operation. He was attacked by an inflammation of the lungs. At his age, with a feeble constitution, racked by his anguish of mind, he was unable to pull through. His last moments were sweetened by the presence of the woman to whom he had consecrated his life, his thoughts, his all. He died peacefully, happy to gaze while sight remained upon the face of the friend who could not see him.

This loss was a cruel sorrow for Madame Récamier. She felt a presentiment that others would soon travel by the same road, Chateaubriand, herself. . . . To distract her sad thoughts Madame Lenormant took her to Normandy. Ampère went with them, and wrote, by her side, a volume which was intended to perpetuate the memory of the friend who had been for half-a-century their "good Ballanche." Chateaubriand also immortalised him in his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*.

In the meanwhile, almost always accompanied by Ampère, she daily went to sit by the man who had written the *Mémoires*. She resurrected a number of anecdotes that he knew already, she spoke of the past, of their friends. But it was very difficult to interest him, and he became gloomier and more morose than ever. Madame Récamier, according

to Ampère, had to carry the whole burden. One day, however, a smile of youth, rather than of infancy, wandered across his thin and bloodless lips. He offered to marry her. He was paralysed. She was blind. Yet he wished to give his name to his friend, as the supreme mark of an affection which had not wavered from the day he had found her by the side of the coffin of Madame de Staël. Madame Récamier refused. On his insistance, she refused again. She did well. She understood that she must remain Madame Récamier, a unique woman, neither wife nor mother, who had given herself to none and whose name would be more indissolubly linked with that of Chateaubriand than if she carried it in reality during the few days of respite that death accorded.

Chateaubriand understood her reasons. He wished, however, to console himself by visiting what he had always called " my old mistress," the sea. He passed a week at Dieppe, whilst Madame Récamier stayed with her niece in Normandy. Soon wearied of Dieppe, Chateaubriand returned to Paris.

Life became even sadder. Hoping that she might recover a little sight, Madame Récamier consented to a second operation for cataract. The result was practically a failure. She became almost blind, and entered eternal night. In the meanwhile the monarchy of July collapsed, and the old king Louis Philippe was forced to tread the same path of exile as his cousin, Charles X., had trod before him. The cannon of those terrible days in June made the windows of the apartment in the Rue du Bac shake. Chateaubriand knew that death was creeping over him. He relapsed into moody silences, and, when he was spoken to, answered with a curt monosyllable. Visibly he became more childish.[1] One day he was seized with fever. Madame Récamier did not wish to leave him. Madame Mohl, whom she had known

[1] " We find ourselves every day at the Rue du Bac, spying upon the glimmering of this great enfeebled mind." J. J. Ampère to Madame Récamier, June 14, 1848. (Ampère. *Correspondance et souvenirs*, Vol. II. p. 160.)

at the Abbaye-aux-Bois as Miss Mary Clarke, now lived in the same house as Chateaubriand, and Madame Récamier begged leave to instal herself in the Mohl apartments. At least, she would be able to fly at any hour to her old friend, and then return to take a little repose when he was resting.[1] She remained for three days with Madame Mohl. Chateaubriand was at his last gasp. He died on July 4, 1848.

Madame Récamier was in despair. She threw herself on the bed where her old companion slept his last sleep, she clasped him with her arms, she bedewed his face with her tears. At last, regaining her self-possession, she seated herself in an armchair and begged Chateaubriand's barber to cut a lock of hair from the illustrious dead. Every one knew that he had expressed the desire to be buried close to the sea; as if he wished always to hear the eternal cadence of the waves over the beach, and to listen to the wild harmonies of the winds which had rocked the cradle of his dreams during the long years of his melancholy childhood in Armorica. The body was transported to the rock of the Grand Bé, off Saint Malo. The municipal council offered a tomb cut in the solid stone. Ampère represented the Abbaye-aux-Bois at the ceremony at Saint Malo.

The death of Chateaubriand was the death of Madame Récamier. Her part was played, and the drama had ended. Her friends, Ampère, Brifaut, Tocqueville, her niece, Madame Lenormant particularly, did not abandon her. They tried to infuse a little interest into the life of this blind old woman. They wished to help her to forget her sorrows. The Vicomtesse d'Agoult, a woman of much intelligence, saw Madame Récamier a few months after she had set aside her white garments for the black robes of mourning. In the atmosphere of the Abbaye, she draws a portrait which must be very true to nature. "One afternoon towards the end of March, 1849," she writes, "I mounted the damp and gloomy stone staircase leading to the isolated apartments on the first floor of the convent in the Rue de Sèvres. Here lived the marvellous beauty

[1] K. O'Meara. *Un salon à Paris*, p. 80.

who had dazzled with her brilliance more than a quarter of a century. I found her in a salon of fair size, but of an old-fashioned appearance. She was seated in an angle by the chimney. Her armchair was of blue silk, surrounded by a grey screen. She rose to meet me, advancing with the hesitation of a person whose sight is dim. She was still graceful, with a slender waist. Her robe and mantle were black, her bonnet white, ornamented with grey ribbons. These framed a pale face with fine features, surmounted by some false brown hair curled in an old-fashioned way. Her physiognomy was as soft as her voice, her reception very gracious, although embarrassed. In murmuring some confused words upon the pleasure of seeing me, she made me sit by her side. . . . She complained of her sight, which was very feeble, and caressed with her thin, little hand my ermine muff. Without doubt its whiteness caught her regard. " I have put on my spectacles in order to see you a little," she said. She asked about my daughter, who, she added courteously, must be a distinguished individual because of my work. The name of Lamartine entered into our conversation. She assured me that she cared greatly for him, that she defended him constantly, for her friends were very severe with regard to him. " He is an artist," she said, in a tone which signified, " it is not necessary to take him too seriously." When I said good-bye to her, she made me promise to visit her often at the Abbaye, but I returned but once. . . . She left me with an agreeable memory. However, I was unable, whilst seeing her and listening to her, to suppress a thought which was not to her advantage. Apparently no very extraordinary gift was required to found the most frequented salon in Paris, and to attract great men. Not only did I miss discovering any particular intelligence in Madame Récamier, in the proper sense of the word, but she did not appear to me to have an interesting personality.[1] For

[1] I remember a phrase which corrects me. " Madame Récamier is able to turn coquetry into a virtue " once said a man of wit. This is certainly a curious originality, which I ought to have studied with more care. (Note of the Vicomtesse d'Agoult.)

conversation, a little prattle; for graces, cajolery; unnatural, and the mistress of no superior art; above all there was no indication of the great lady, assured of her position, who carries her age with dignity; hesitation in her voice, hesitation in her gestures, in all, the embarrassment of an old pensioner." [1]

An old pensioner! The description was correct. She had never been a real woman, she had never been a mother, she had limited her ambitions to simple vanities, and her life to the intrigues of coquetry. She lived and died a pensioner, a prey to an old woman's foolish terror. The cholera frightened her. The epidemic of 1832 left a terrible remembrance of its passage through Paris. More than usual, Madame Récamier dreaded the name. The disagreeable eventuality of her death haunted her. Then the plague came to Paris for the second time.

As soon as she was told of the new invasion, she went to her niece, who lived with her husband in the Bibliothèque Nationale. This quarter appeared to escape the epidemic, whilst that of the Abbaye-aux-Bois was pestilential. Besides, in her niece's family, every care of nursing could be exercised if the occasion arose.

The need soon arrived. The continual fear which tormented her probably predisposed her to the contagion. Her nervous state enfeebled her, and prevented her from sleeping, but it did not stop her from taking a daily carriage drive, or from receiving her friends. This somewhat reassured her.

Madame Récamier was leading her usual life, as peaceful as the fear of the epidemic permitted, when suddenly she was taken with a chill. Her hands became cold, her feet also, her forehead burning. She was on the verge of fainting. When she was placed in a warm bed she swooned away. Upon recovering her senses, she judged herself to be in so grave a condition that she dictated her last wishes to her maid. She had hardly finished when the cholera, for it was indeed that disease, completed its work of destruction.

[1] Vicomtesse d'Agoult, *Mes souvenirs*, pp. 357-362.

The poor patient had no longer any fear. On the contrary, she fought with the utmost courage. Throughout the night, in the midst of cruel pain, her limbs rigid, her skin like marble, she resisted the convulsive attacks. During moments of ease, she asked for news of her friends, of Ampère, amongst others, who passed this night of anguish in the drawing-room with Madame Lenormant. She begged them to enter her room and receive a last farewell.

On May 11, 1849, much suffering ended a life which had hitherto been wholly free from such sorrow, for it can best be described as a springtime lasting more than half-a-century. Hardly had death delivered its fatal blow than her features became as in her early youth. Her beauty again shone forth, as dazzling as in the days of the Consulate and the Empire, but veiled with an entrancing gravity. She passed into the unknown, as she had lived, young and beautiful.

# INDEX


Abbaye-aux-Bois, 225, 226, 240
Abrantès, duchesse d', Laure Permon, Madame Junot (1784—1838) viii, 61 *note*, 68, 101 *note*, 114, 118 *note*, 120 *note*, 124 *note*, 141, 163 *note*, 177, 213, 220, 284, 287, 309
Académie française, 65
*Adolphe*, by Benjamin Constant, 140, 182
Agoult, vicomtesse d', 284 *note*, 321, 322, 323
Aigle, de l', viii
Aix-la-Chapelle, Congress of, 138, 220 and *note*
Aix (Savoy), 144
Albano, 157
Alexander, Emperor of Russia, 33, 124 *note*, 209, 220, 251 *note*
Aligre, hôtel d', 47
Allart, Hortense, 307
Amiens, Peace of, vii, 108, 116
Ampère, Jean Jacques (1800—1864), 151 *note*
—— introduction to Mme. Récamier, 234, 235
—— declaration of love, 236
—— changes his name to Edward, 237
—— accompanies Mme. Récamier to Rome, 257
—— the revolution of July, 1830, 281
—— election to the Academy, 312, 317
—— with Mme. Récamier at the end, 319, 321
—— at the funeral of Chateaubriand, 321
—— at the death-bed of Mme. Récamier, 324
Ancelot, Madame, 185 *note*, 232, 303 and *note*, 304, 313
Angers, David d', 233
Angervilliers, 186
Angoulême, duchesse d', 169
Anjou, Rue d', 216
Anspach, margravine of, 109
*Antigone*, by Ballanche, 156
Appony, Madame, 279
Arenenberg, château d', 292
Argenson, marquis d', 272 *note*, 273
Argout, d', 310
Arlincourt, vicomte d', 227
Arnauld, the "Grand," 151
Artois, comte d', see Charles X.
Auger, Madame, 228
Augustus of Prussia, prince, visits Coppet, 124
—— meets Mme. Récamier, 125
—— his good looks, 126
—— exchanges rings with Mme. Récamier, 128
—— Benjamin Constant and, 131
—— returns to Berlin, 133
—— commands Prussian artillery, 134, 137
—— at Aix-la-Chapelle, 138, 220
—— subject of a romance by Mme. de Genlis, 178
—— Chateaubriand and, 245
—— death, 317
Aulnay, 310
Austerlitz, 120, 141 *note*
Austria, Emperor of, 220 *note*, 251 *note*
Auxerre, 122
Avaux, Mme. d', 122

Bac, rue du, 230 *note*, 320
Baciocchi, Mme., see Bonaparte, Elisa
Bagatelle, 85
Ballanche, 168, 197
—— his personality, 149 and *note*
—— his friends, 150
—— fascinated by Mme. Récamier, 151
—— at Rome, 153, 156
—— jealous of Chateaubriand, 221
—— in the Rue de Sèvres, 226
—— second visit to Rome, 257
—— Lamennais, 290
—— his death, 318, 319

Balzac, 172, 183, 243 *note*, 283, 284, 287, 313
Bank of France, 119, 120, 121
Baraguey-d'Hilliers, comtesse de, 228
Barante, 131, 142, 147, 151, 202, 228 *note*, 279
Barbier, Auguste, 216
Barère de Vieuzac, Bertrand (1755—1841), 33 and *note*, 65, 96
Barillon, 68
Barras, P. F. J. N. (1755—1829), 45 and *note*, 47, 59
—— his fêtes at the Luxembourg, 48
—— his visitors and circle, 50, 53 *note*
—— Madame de Staël, 55 and *note*
Bartolozzi, x
Basle, 298
Basse-du-Rempart, rue 141, 216
Basterrèche, 68
Bazin, banker, 67
Beatrice, 53
Beauharnais, Eugène (1781—1824), 85
—— invited by Mme. Récamier, 68
—— his passion for her, 77, 78
Beauharnais, Hortense, afterwards Queen of Holland (1783—1837), Benjamin Constant reads *Adolphe* to her, 140
—— created duchesse de Saint-Leu, 169
—— courts Mme. Récamier, 178
—— meets Mme. Récamier in Rome, 259
—— at Constance, 292
—— at Arenenberg, 293
Beauharnais, Josephine, afterwards Empress (1763—1814), 45 and *note*, 50, 53 and *note*, 77, 115
Beaujolais, comte de, x
Beaumont, Mme. de, 150, 181, 221
Bedmar, 88
Belgiojoso, princesse de, 216 *note*
Berlin, 124 *note*, 245
Bernadotte, general, afterwards King of Sweden, 1764—1844), x, 95
—— letter to Mme. Récamier, xi
—— admires Mme. Récamier, 66 *note*
—— invited by M. Récamier, 68
—— obtains Bernard's pardon, 71
—— visits Mme. Récamier's salon, 72, 80, 102
Bernadotte and Montmorency, 112
—— a traitor, 137
—— his reward, 169
Bernard, M., father of Mme. Récamier, 28, 219
—— his good nature, 30
—— a man of fortune, 32
—— nominated receiver of taxes, 30, 38, 39
—— feeble character, 39
—— his friends, 65
—— postal administrator, 71
—— accused of conspiracy, 71
—— saved from death, 71
—— Fouché and his release, 116
—— at the Rue Basse-du-Rempart 141
—— visits his daughter at Châlons, 147
Bernard, Mme., mother of Mme. Récamier, 28
—— her receptions, 32
—— probable obligation to Calonne, 38
—— her coquetry, 39
—— her friends, 65
—— friendship with Mme. Hulot, 72
—— her death, 121
Berne, 33 *note*.
Bernetti, cardinal, 290
Berny, Mme. de, 287
Berri, duc de, 224, 297 *note*
Berri, duchesse de, 297 and *note*, 298, 299
Berryer, 297
Bertaud, 63
Berthier, xi
Bertin, 233
Berton, general, 246
Biron, hôtel, 47
Blanche, rue, 115
Blois, 142
Blucher, general, 133
Boigne, Mme. de, 85 and *note*, 154, 155, 169, 229, 235, 279, 307, 310
Bonaparte, Caroline, afterwards Mme. Murat, Queen of Naples, Comtesse de Lipona (1782-1839),
—— visits Mme. Récamier's salon, 77
—— Mme. Récamier cultivates her friendship, 80, 87
—— at Neuilly, 117
—— aids Fouché, 118
—— her treasury, 137
—— courted by Metternich, 141

Bonaparte, Caroline, as Queen of Naples, 161-165
—— reward of her treachery, 169
—— desires Mme. Récamier's protection, 179
—— as Comtesse de Lipona, 266
Bonaparte, Elisa, afterwards Mme. Baciocchi (1777—1820), 77, 80, 83, 87, 89, 101
Bonaparte, Jerome, afterwards King of Westphalia (1784—1860), 260 and *note*.
Bonaparte, Joseph (1768—1844), 80
Bonaparte, Lucien (1775—1840)
—— his infatuation for Mme. Récamier, 80
—— a professional politician, 83
—— his character, 83
—— his features, 84 *note*
—— meets Mme. Récamier at Bagatelle, 85
—— death of his wife, 87
—— letter to Mme. Récamier, 88
—— close of the idyll, 90-92
—— vengeance on Mme. Récamier, 93, 94
—— a useful friend, 99
—— his quarrel with Mme. Récamier, 111
Bonaparte, " Madame Mère " (1750—1836), 89
Bonaparte, Napoleon, 1769—1821, 33, 45, *note*, 49, 53 and *note*, 66 *note*, 87, 88
—— returns from Egypt, 68
—— First Consul, 68
—— action towards Bernard, 71
—— and Récamier's bankruptcy, 93
—— his wife's circle, 99
—— warns Mme. Récamier, 102, 110
—— desire for absolute power, 111
—— his portrait, 113
—— proclaimed Emperor, 115
—— Mme. Récamier refuses his propositions, 117-119
—— and Prince Augustus of Prussia, 133 *note*
—— and Mme. Staël, 142, 143, 145
—— returns from Elba, 201, 202
—— Waterloo, 206
Bonaparte, Pauline, Princess Borghèse (1780—1825), 80, 155, 192
Bonneval, general de, 115
Bordeaux, duc de, afterwards Comte de Chambord, 275, 281 and *note*, 297 *note*, 299 *note*
Borghèse, princesse, *see* Bonaparte, Pauline
Boufflers, chevalier de, 123
Boufflers, Mme de, 108, 109
Bouillé, de, viii
Bourienne, 91 *note*, 93 *note*
Boyer, Christine, Mme. Lucien Bonaparte, 80, 87
Brienne, cardinal de, 311
Brifaut, 292, 312, 321
Bristol, earl of, 233
Broglie, duchesse de (see Staël, Albertine de)
Broglie, Duke Victor de, 74 and *note*, 198, 199, 230, 247, 279, 297
Bruce, Lady Augusta, 231 *note*
Brunswick, duke of, 133
Brussels, 33 *note*

Cabanès, doctor, 38 *note*
Calonne, Charles Alexandre de, 30 and *note*, 38
Cambacérès, 112
Cannes, 199
Canova, 155, 156, 165, 166
Capelle, baron, 148 *note*, 154
Caraman, de, 254 *note*
Caron, 249
Carr, Sir John, 59 *note*, 61 *note*, 62 *note*, 82 *note*, 101 *note*, 108 *note*
Castellane, de, 249
Castlereagh, 220 *note*
Castries, duchesse de, 284 and *note*, 287
Castries, marquis de, 246
Catalini, Mme., 174
Catellan, Mme. de, 142, 146, 186
Catellan, marquis de, 226 and *note*
Catherine II. of Prussia, 33 *note*
Cauterets, 278
Cavaignac, general Godeford, 38
Cavaignac, Mme., 38, 67
Cayla, Mme. du, 264
Châlons-sur-Marne, 146, 147, 148
Champs Elysées, 47, 59
Chapelle-Saint-Eloi, 302
Charavay autographs, 78, 88, 92
Charles X., x *note*, 75, 113, 266, 267, 275, 278, 281 *note*, 279 *note*, 298
Charrière, Mme. de, 182
Chasles, Philarète, 229, 283, 285
Chastenay, Mme. de, 47 *note*
Chateaubriand, François René Auguste, vicomte de (1768—1848), 66, 76 *note*, 86, 110, 112, 137, 146, 202

Chateaubriand, vicomte de, description of the Duchess of Devonshire, x
—— Barras, 49, 53
—— Adrien de Montmorency, 74 *note*
—— Mme. Récamier's visit to London, 109
—— friendship with Ballanche, 150
—— *De Buonaparte et des Bourbons*, 164
—— Benjamin Constant, 182
—— the death-bed of Mme. de Staël, 216
—— Montmorency's jealousy, 221
—— personal appearance, 229
—— weariness, 230
—— causes jealousy, 231
—— antipathy of Louis XVIII., 244
—— ambassador at Berlin, 245
—— conference of Verona, 251-255
—— quarrels at Verona, 255 *note*
—— Madame de Chateaubriand, 268, 271
—— at the Academy, 273, 317, 318
—— ambassador at Rome, 276, 277, 278
—— visits to Mme. Récamier, 283
—— under arrest, 290, 291
—— in Switzerland, 294, 295, 296
—— efforts on behalf of the Duchesse de Berri, 297, 298, 299
—— opinion of the royal family, 299
—— writes *Mêmoirs d'outre-tombe*, 300, 301, 302
—— gloom and ill-health, 317, 318
—— death of Mme. de Chateaubriand, 319
— his death and burial, 321
Chateaubriand, Mme. de—
—— her irreproachable conduct, 268
—— her temper, 271 and *note*
—— friendship with Mme. Récamier, 272
—— at Rome, 277
—— later life, 319
—— death, 319
Chatenay, 310
Chaumont-sur-Loire, château de, 142
Chaussée d'Antin, 46, 60 *note*
Chevreuse, Mme. de, 121, 122, 149, 153
Chimay, princess de (see Tallien, Mme.
Chouans, 71
Clarke, Miss Mary, Madame Mohl, 230 and *note*, 231, 234, 320
Cléry, rue de, 67
Clichy-la-Garonne, 56, 116
Cochelet, Mlle., 296
Comédie-Française, 118
Committee of Public Safety, 33 *note*
Concordat, 108
Constance, lake, 292
Constant, Benjamin (1767—1830) 76 *note*, 86, 111, 142
—— reference to Barras, 48 and *note*
—— Mme. de Staël and Mme. Récamier, 56
—— Sébastiani, 114
—— Prince Augustus of Prussia, 126
—— at Coppet, 132
—— reads *Adolphe*, 140
—— secretary to Bernadotte, 169
—— invited to Vienna, 180
—— early life, 180
—— conversational powers, 181
—— Chateaubriand's description, 182
—— his affection for Mme. Récamier, 184-191
—— threat of suicide, 192
—— jealousy, 195, 196, 198
—— as a royalist, 200
—— writes for the *Débats*, 201
—— invited to the Tuileries, 203
—— bitterness of the royalists, 204
—— proscribed by Louis XVIII., 207
—— Mme. de Krüdener, 209
—— end of his love, 211, 212
—— death of Mme. de Staël, 216
—— conspiracy of Saumur, 246, 247, 249
*Constitutional*, 316
Coppet, château de, 59, 122, 123, 131, 132, 142, 296
Corbière, 251
Corday, Charlotte, 25 *note*
*Corinne* (Madame de Staël), 53
Coriolio, de, 276 *note*
Corneille, 233
Corso, the, 156
Coudert, 246, 247, 248
Council of the Five Hundred, 33 *note*, 81
Cousin, Victor, 279

Couthon, 42, 196
Crassy, 34
Créqui, marquise de, 248, 306
Cunningham, lady, viii
Curchod, Susanne, 34 *note*
Custine, Mme de, 221, 277
Cyvoct, Amélie (see Lenormant, Mme.)

Danton, 25
Dantzic, duchesse de, 170
David, 107, 279
Davy, Sir Humphry, 233
*Débats*, 201, 265
*De Buonaparte et des Bourbons* (Chateaubriand), 164
Decazes, 214, 244, 310
Deffand, Mme. du, 64, 200, 229, 272
Délacroix, Eugène, 233
Delessert, 68
Delannoy, Mme., 68
Desbordes-Valmore, Mme., 275, 314
Devonshire, duchess of, x, xi, 109, 233, 258
Diderot, 27, 28
Dieppe, 220
Dijon, 124, 148
Directory, the, 45 *note*, 46, 49
Doudeauville, duc de, 147, 224, 247, 279
Douglas, marquis of, x
Dourmerc, Mme., 68
Doyen, 68
Drouôt, hôtel, 88
Dubois, 233, 279
Ducis, 66, 75
Ducreux, portrait painter, 46
Dugas-Monthel, 279
Dumont, 310
Dupin, Mme., 28, 56
Duras, 122, 170, 174, 221, 229, 232, 243, 247, 252, 277

Edgworth, Maria, 233
Elba, isle of, 158
Elgin, lord, viii
Eliot, George, 231 *note*
Ems, 313, 317
Enclos, Ninon de l', 238
Enfantin, 68
Enghien, duc d', 113, 116
Epinay, Mme. d', 27, 28
Erskine, lord, viii, 33 *note*
*Essay on Suicide* (Mme. de Staël), 131
*Esther* (Racine), 233
Etchegoyen, d', 68
Ette, Mlle. d', 27, 29

Fauriel, 230, 310, 311 *note*
Ferdinand of Prussia, 124
Ferrara, 299
Ferronays, de la, 254 *note*, 278
Ferté-Imbault, 170
Fesch, cardinal, 277
Feydeau concerts, 47
Fiano, Palazzo, 156
Foa, Mme. Eugénie, 314, 315
Fontanes, mme. de, 279, 316
Fontanes, marquis de, 47 and *note*, 150, 271
Fontenay, marquise de (see Tallien, mme.)
Forbin, de, 155, 192, 195, 198, 201
Fossé, château de, 142
Fouché, duc d'Otrante, 116, 117, 118, 119, 122, 161, 182, 188
Fox, C. J., viii, 33 *note*
Francis I., 78
Francueil, 28
Frederick the Great, 124
Fréron, 53 *note*
Fructidor, *coup d'état* of, 65

Gaskell, Mrs., 231 *note*
Gautier, Théophile, 243 *note*
Gay, Delphine, Mme. Emile de Girardin, 228, 243 *note*, 279, 284, 313
Gay, madame Sophie, 138 *note*, 228, 284
Geneva, 124
Genlis, Mme. de, 125, 174, 177, 178
Genoa, 66 *note*
Geoffrin, Mme., 37, 75, 170, 272
Georges, Mlle., 141
Gérando, de, 317
Gérard, painter, 107, 134, 138, 279
Gibbon, Edward, 34, 63
Girardin, Emile de, 243 *note*, 313
Girardin, Mme. Delphine de (see Gay, Delphine).
Girodet, 287
Girondists, 25
Gisquet, 291
Givet, 137
Glenbervie, lord, 143 *note*
Goethe, 287
Goncourt, de, 61 *note*
Gonsalvi, cardinal, 258
Gordon, duchess of, viii
Gramont, Mme. de, 279
Grandison, Sir Charles, 74
Graveson, comtesse de, 84

Greffulhe, 198
Greuze, 27
Gronow, captain, 232
Guéhenneuc, 170
Guérin, 258
Guignes, duc de, ix, 109
Guyot, abbé, 71
Guizot, 74 *note*, 297

Hainguerlot, banker, 46, 68
Hainguerlot, Mme., 45, 68
Hamelin, 68
Hamelin, Mme., 47, 53 *note*, 54, 60 *note*, 68, 114, 250, 284
Hamilton, duke of, x, 233
Hanriot, 42
Harpe, F. C. de la, 33 and *note*, 46, 65, 96
Haussonville, comte d', 277 *note*, 301, 302 *note*
Hautefeuille, de, 318
Hervas, 68
Hohenlohe, prince, 133 *note*
Holland, lord, viii, 33 *note*
Holyrood, x
Hortense, Queen (see Beauharnais, Hortense)
Hottinguer, banker, 67
Houdetot, Mme., de, 237
Houssaye, Arsène, 49, 50, 92
Hubert, Robert, artist, 102
Hugo, Victor, 173, 243 *note*, 313, 318
Hulot, Mme., 72
Humblot, 31, 233

Isabey, 305

Jerome Bonaparte, King of Westphalia (see Bonaparte, Jerome)
Jordan, Camille, 33 and *note*, 65, 134, 149, 153, 168
Joseph Bonaparte (see Bonaparte, Joseph)
Josephine, Empress, see Beauharnais, Josephine
Joubert, 47 and *note*, 150, 181, 216, 271
*Journal Intime* (Benjamin Constant), 185, 186, 191, 195, 207, 208, 210
Juan, Don, 74
Julien, 68
Junot, 66, 68, 80, 120
Junot, madame (see Abrantès, duchesse d')
Jussieu, de, 235, 236

Karr, Alphonse, 243 *note*
Kensington Gardens, x
Kératry, de, 233
Kock, Paul de, 288
Kotzebue, 59 *note*, 61 *note*, 62 *note*, 67 *note*, 113 *note*
Krüdener, Mme. de, 53, 207, 208, 209, 210

Laborde, 41
La Bruyère, 172
Lacordaire, 280
Lafayette, 248, 289
Lacretelle, comtesse de, 228
La Déserte, convent of, 31
Lafayette, 246, 289
Lafitte, 246
Lafitte, Rue, 226
Lafont, 278
Lafontaine, 169
Lainé, 202
Lamartine, Alphonse de, 26, 173, 279, 313, 318
Lambert, Mme. de, 272, 273
Lamennais, abbé, de, 169, 276 *note*, 290
Lamoignon, Christian de, 72, 117, 121, 215
Landrecies, 137
Lange, Mme., 287
Lange, Mlle., 47
Lannes, 68
Latouche, de, 274, 275, 279
Laura, 53
Lausanne, 33 *note*, 34 *note*
Lauzun, duc de, 31 *note*, 48
Laval, duc de (see Montmorency, Adrien de)
Laval, duchesse de, 170
Lavedan, Henri, 41
Lavedan, Léon, 133 *note*
Lavergne, Léonce de, 300
Lavoisier, 41
Lebas, 42
Le Brun, 279
Lecouteulx, 68
Leipzig, battle of, 169
Leman, lake, 123
Lemontey, Pierre Edouard, 32 and *note*, 65
Lenormant, Mme., Amelie Cyvoct
—— *Souvenirs et correspondance* quoted, xiii, 37, 38, 39, 41, 48, 49, 50, 55, 56, 61, 71, 78, 80, 87, 88, 91, 92, 109, 119, 126, 129, 137, 146, 169, 192, 201, 203, 233, 259, 280

Lenormant, Mme., as a child visits her aunt, 147
—— goes to Rome, 115
—— second visit to Italy, 257
—— meets Charles Lenormant, 266
—— her marriage, 272
—— her salon, 305
Lenormant, Charles (1802—1859),
—— meets Mme. Récamier at Naples, 265
—— marries her niece, 272
—— Inspector of the Beaux-Arts, 272
—— political ideas, 282
—— at the Bibliothèque Nationale, 297 and *note*
—— lack of eloquence, 308
Leo XII., pope, 290
Lespinasse, Mlle. de, 272
Letissier, Mme. de, 301
Levert, Mlle., 231
Lévis, duc de, 56
Lipona, comtesse de (see Bonaparte, Caroline)
Loménie, de, 311, 312
Longchamps, 49, 50, 59
Longwy, 137
Longueville, duchesse de, 27
Louis XIV., 306
Louis XV., 31 *note*
Louis XVI., ix, 33 *note*, 45 *note*, 97, 99
Louis XVIII., 33 *note*, 45 *note*, 74, 207, 247, 266, 281
Louis of Prussia, prince, 131, 200, 219
Louis Philippe (see Orléans, duc d')
Lucchesi-Pallis, comte Hector, 298
Lucchesini, 100
Lucerne, lake of, 295
Lucien Bonaparte, see Bonaparte, Lucien
Lucien Bonaparte, Mme., see Boyer, Christine
Lückner, marshal de, 74
Ludre, Mme. de, 216 *note*
Lunéville, peace negotiations of, vii
Luxembourg, Mme. de, ix
Luxembourg, palace of the, 48 and *note*, 49, 53, 55
Luynes, duchesse de, 121, 149, 153, 170
Lyons, 28

Mackintosh, viii
Mail, rue du, 36
Maillé, duchesse de, 243
Maintenon, château de, 302
Maintenon, Mme. de, 292, 306
Malet, Mde, 68
Mallet du Pan, 55 *note*
Marat, J.P., 25
Marcellus, de, 247, 252
Maret, 133 *note*
Marengo, battle of, 66 *note*, 89, 138 and *note*
Marie Louise, Empress, 141 *note*
Marin, chevalier, xii
Marmont, 68, 80, 202
Martignac, de, 276
Masséna, 66 *note*, 77, 80
Mathilde, princess, 260
Mauberge, 137
Mazarin, palais, 273, 292
Mazois, 161
Melegari, Dora, 185
*Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, 71, 91 *note*, 119, 120
*Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, 201
Méneval, memoirs, 71 and *note*
Ménière, doctor, 283
Merimée, 234, 279, 307, 308
Merlin, comtesse, 284
Metternich, 141 and *note*, 148 *note*, 251 *note*, 266
Michel, 68
Michelet, 212, 227, 309
Millin, 101
Miollis, general, 151, 167
Mirabeau, 53 *note*, 150
Mohl, Julius, 151 *note*, 230
Mohl, Mme. see Clarke, Mary
*Moïse* (Chateaubriand), 278, 279
*Moniteur*, 316
Monmerqué, 66
*Monsieur Dupont* (Paul de Kock), 288
Montaigne, 63
Montalembert, comte de, 234
Mont-Blanc, Rue de, 56, 60, 65, 100, 114, 140
Montebello, duchesse de, 170
Montesquiou, xiii, 289
Montlosier, de, 146, 204, 205
Montmirail, marquise de, 146, 224
Montmorency, family, viii, 74, 117, 121
Montmorency, Adrien de, Prince and Duc de Laval, 95, 196, 232
—— visits Mme. Récamier's salon, 72
—— plots against Napoleon, 112
—— as ambassador, 169
—— ambassador at Rome, 258 259, 260, 266

Montmorency, Adrien de, ambassador at Vienna, 276
—— Minister of Foreign Affairs, 278
—— retires to Normandy, 282
—— his death, 303
Montmorency, Mathieu de, 53, 95
—— visits Mme. Récamier's salon, 72
—— life and character, 72, 73, 74
—— royalist hopes, 111
—— Napoleon's portrait, 113
—— the Emperor, 119
—— visits Mme. de Staël, 144
—— advises Mme. Récamier to go to Italy, 154
—— knight of honour, 169
—— his behaviour, 219, 220
—— the Vallée-aux-Loups, 224
—— sends Chateaubriand to Berlin, 244, 245
—— conspiracy of Saumur, 247
—— Foreign Minister, 250
—— conference of Verona, 251, 252, 253, 254
—— created a duke, 255
—— elected an academician, 274
—— governor to the Duc de Bordeaux, 275
—— sudden death, 275
Montpensier, duc de, x
Montrond, de, 114, 115, 122, 189, 250
Montyon prix, 42 *note*
Moreau, 66 *note*, 102, 112, 116
Moreau, Mme, 112
Morez, 123
Mouchy, duc and duchesse de, 221, 290
Mounier, 220
Mousseaux, 47
Mozart, xii
Murat, 68, 77, 80, 137, 161-164, 169, 179
Murat, Mme. (see Bonaparte, Caroline)
Murray, John, 143 *note*
Musset, Alfred de, 243 *note*

Nadaillac, de, 198, 207
Nancy, 31 *note*, 124, 133
Nantes, 202
Naples, 158, 264
Napoleon II. (see Rome, King of)
Napoleon III., 259, 295
Narbonne, comte Louis de, 72, 153, 155
Necker, Jacques, 30 *note*, 34 *note*, 56, 216
Neuilly, 117
Neuve de Berry, rue, 198
*Neveu de Rameau* (Diderot), 28
Ney, 157
Nicole, 151
*Night Thoughts* (Young), 63
Noailles, duc de, 53, 168, 266, 291, 302, 312
Nodier, Charles, 313
Norvins, de, 155, 157

*Oliver* (Mme. de Duras), 229
Orléans, duc d', Louis Philippe, 33 *note*, 281 and *note*, 320
Orléans, duc d', Philippe Egalité, 33, 93, 174
Osmond, marquis d', 169
Oudinot, 157
Ouin combination, 67
Ouvrard, banker, 66, 68, 93, 199
Ozanam, Frédéric, 311

Padua, 299
*Palingénésie* (Ballanche), 227
Pamela, daughter of Philippe Egalité, 33
Panurge, 41
Paris,—
—— during the Terror, 25, 26
—— under the Directory, 46
Parquin, 296
Pasquier, 26, 85 *note*, 146, 155, 234, 235, 276, 279, 310 and *note*
Paterson, Elizabeth, wife of Jerome Bonaparte, 260 *note*
*Peau de chagrin* (Balzac), 285, 286
Pélissier, Olympe, Madame Rossini, 286
Pellisson, 149
Périer, Auguste, 233, 289
Périer, Casimir, 289
Permon, Mme. de, 68
Perregaux, banker, 46, 61, 66, 67
Perregaux, Mlle., 68, 170
Petrarch, 222
Philippe, Egalité (see Orléans, Philippe d')
Philippeville, 137
Plessis-Chamant, 88, 89, 90
Polignac, de, 279, 282
*Polyeucte* (Corneille), 233
Pompeii, 161
Ponsard, 312 *note*
Pourtalès, 68
Prague, 299

Prentzlow, battle of, 133
Provence, rue de, 67
Provence, comte de, 113
Prussia, King of, 133 *note*, 138, 220 *note*, 251 *note*

Quinault, Mlle, 96
Quixote, Don, 74
*Quotidienne*, 265

Rabelais, 75 *note*, 225
Rachel, 232 and *note*, 233, 240
Racine, 233
Radet, Mme., 45
Raguse, duc de (see Marmont)
Raguse, duchesse de, 170
Raincy, 93, 94
Ravaisson-Molhen, 177
Ravel, 67
Raynal, *Histoire philosophique des deux Indes*, 63
Rayneval, 220
Réal, 67
Récamier, Jeanne François Julie Adélaïde (1777—1849)—
—— receptions in the Rue du Mont Blanc, ix
—— visit to London, ix—xii
—— birth at Lyons, 28
—— parentage, 28
—— sent to Villefranche, 30
—— first admirer, 31
—— education, 31, 32
—— marriage, 26, 36, 37
—— meets her future husband, 35
—— wife or daughter, 37, 38
—— early married life, 40
—— in 1795, 45
—— portrait at the salon of 1796, 46
—— attends La Harpe's lectures, 46
—— simple dress, 47
—— visits Barras, 48, 49, 50, 53
—— at Longchamps, 49
—— graceful dancing, 53, 54
—— meets Mme. de Staël, 55 and *note*, 56
—— at the Rue du Mont Blanc, 56, 60
—— her simplicity an artifice, 47 *note*
—— her headdress, 60
—— decoration of her home, 60-63
—— small conversational ability, 64
—— salon in the Rue du Mont-Blanc, 65
Récamier, Mme., crowded assemblies, 67
—— scene in her bedroom, 67
—— visits other houses, 67
—— hostility towards the first Consul, 71, 102
—— influenced by Mme. de Staël, 71
—— Eugène de Beauharnais, 77, 78
—— lack of ideals, 78
—— Lucien Bonaparte's affection, 80
—— meets him at Bagatelle, 95
—— her conventionality, 86
—— a letter of condolence, 88
—— breaks off with Lucien, 92
—— Lucien's revenge, 93, 94
—— no settled opinions, 95
—— airs of confidence, 97
—— her charity, 97
—— salon under the Consulate, 98
—— a ball at the Rue du Mont-Blanc, 101
—— portrait by David, 107
—— daily life, 107, 108
—— an Easter collection at Saint Roch, 108
—— visits London, ix, 109
—— estrangement from the Bonaparte family, 111
—— trial of Moreau, 112
—— her portrait by the print-sellers, 113
—— Monsieur de Montrond, 114
—— Fouché and the Emperor's proposal, 116, 119
—— falls in love with Prince Augustus of Prussia, 126-139
—— portrait by Gérard, 134
—— at Aix-la-Chapelle, 138
—— returns to Paris in 1807, 140
—— Metternich, 141
—— removes to the Rue Basse-du-Rempart, 141
—— at Coppet with Mme. de Staël, 142
—— life at Fossé, 142, 143
—— in exile, 144-147
—— resides at Lyons, 149
—— fascinates Ballanche, 151
—— Auguste de Staël, 154
—— visits Rome, 154
—— friendship with Canova, 156, 166
—— her benevolence, 156
—— the fisherman of Albano, 156
—— visits Naples, 158

Récamier, Mme., the Queen of Naples, 158-166
—— aristocratic friends, 170
—— salon during the Restoration, 173
—— letters to Benjamin Constant, 183-191
—— fear of duels, 195
—— her inherent frivolity, 199
—— quarrels with Benjamin Constant, 204, 205
—— Madame de Krüdener, 208, 209
—— her behaviour towards Benjamin Constant, 211
—— welcomes the Duke of Wellington, 213, 214
—— death of Mme. de Staël, 215
—— acquaintance with Chateaubriand, 215
—— goes to Aix-la-Chapelle, 220
—— jealousy of Montmorency and Ballanche, 221
—— translates Petrarch, 222
—— financial misfortune, 224
—— settles in the Abbaye-aux-Bois, 225
—— Ballanche's affection, 226
—— friendship with Chateaubriand, 229
—— Miss Mary Clarke, 230
—— jealousy of Chateaubriand's friends, 231, 232
—— an evening with Rachel, 233
—— her circle at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, 233, 239, 240, 279, 285, 289, 312
—— J. J. Ampère, 234, 237
—— letters from Chateaubriand, 245, 251, 254
—— conspiracy of Saumur, 246, 247, 249, 250
—— her enemies, 250
—— goes to Rome, 1823, 257
—— her salon in Rome, 258
—— meets Queen Hortense, 259
—— Jerome Napoleon, 260
—— at Naples, 264, 265
—— Charles Lenormant, 265
—— friendship with Mme. de Chateaubriand, 271
—— elections to the Académie, 272-274, 291, 313, 317
—— death of Montmorency, 275
—— death of her husband, 280
—— portrayed by Balzac, 286, 287, 288
Récamier, Mme., fear of cholera, 291, 323
—— visits Switzerland, 292
—— *Mémories d'outre-tombe*, 300, 301, 302
—— Mme. Ancelot, 303
—— her last days, 306-323
—— with Mme. de Boigne, 310
—— visits Ems, 313
—— blindness, 319
—— death of Ballanche, 319
—— Chateaubriand proposes marriage, 320
—— death of Chateaubriand, 321
—— her death, 323
Récamier, Jacques Rose, marriage, 26, 36, 37
—— early business career, 34
—— meets Juliette, 35
—— moral character, 35, 37
—— acquaintance with the Bernards, 39
—— life after marriage, 40
—— during the Revolution, 40, 41 and *note*
—— takes Juliette to Barras, 48
—— town and country houses, 55
—— introduces Mme. de Staël to Juliette, 59
—— house in the Rue du Mont Blanc, 60
—— his salon neutral ground, 66
—— and Lucien Bonaparte, 90
—— interests of the bank, 91
—— threatened bankruptcy, 93
—— bankrupt, 119, 120, 121
—— asks for his wife's aid, 120
—— Mme. de Staël's sympathy, 122
—— Prince Augustus of Prussia, 128, 129
—— financial losses, 224
—— death at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, 280
Regnault de Saint Jean d'Angely, viii, 155
Reichardt, 61, 101, 102 *note*
Reiset, vicomte de, 124
Rémusat, de, 306
Rémusat, Mme. de, 75, 76 *note*
Rhine, the, 295
Richelieu, duc de, 219
Robert, Léopold, 258
Robespierre, 25, 42
Rocca, de, 148, 149 and *note*, 238
Rochefoucauld, la, 121
Rochefoucauld, vicomtesse de la, 310

Rochefoucauld, Sosthène de la, 147, 264, 272, 275
Rochefoucauld-Doudeauville (see Doudeauville, duc de)
Rodrigues, 315
Roederer, 66
Roger, Mme., 68
Roger, of the Academy, 273
Rohan-Chabot, duc de, 158, 161, 169
Rome, King of, 246
Ronchard, de, 302
Rossini, Mme., 286
Rougemont, Mme., 68
Rousseau, J. J., 29, 56, 237, 295
Rousselin de Saint-Albin, Alexandre 132
Rovigo, duc de, 144, 146, 149 *note*, 154

Saalfeld, battle of, 124
Sabran, comte Elzéar de, 123
Saint-Alphonse, General Gentil de, 246
Saint-Cloud, 213
Saint-Denis, Rue, 63
Saint-Germain, Faubourg, 121, 170, 171, 213, 292
Saint Helena, 71
Saint-Just, 42
Saint-Leu, duchesse de, see Beauharnais, Hortense
Saint-Marc, Girardin, 279
Saint-Maximin, 87
Saint Petersburg, 33 *note*
Saint-Roch, church of, 50, 108
Saint-Simon, duc de, 239
Sainte-Aulaire, de, 279
Sainte-Beuve, 50, 177, 192, 234, 236, 239, 307, 312, 315, 316
Saints-Pères, rue des, 32
Salisbury, lady, 109
Salvage, Mme., 291
Salvandy, 234
Sand, George, 28, 56, 275, 287
San Domingo, island of, 54
Sappey, 85
Sardinia, King of, 251 *note*
Sartory, baroness de, 84
Saumur, conspiracy of, 246-8
Scribe, 312
Sébastiani, general, 66 *note*, 68, 98, 114
Séguin, banker, 46, 66
Ségur, marshal de, 38
Ségur, " sans cérémonie," 72
Sénac de Meilhan, 306
Senlis, 88
September, massacres of, 25
Séroux d'Agincourt, 258
Sèvres, 226
Sèvres, rue de, 226
Shakespeare, xii
Sicard, abbé, 157
Simonard, 30, 31, 141, 148
Sirejean, 246-8
Sismondi, 142, 174, 181
Soissons, 124, 133
Somerset, duchess of, x
Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, vicomte de, 285 *note*
Staël, Albertine de, Broglie, duchesse de, 171, 199
Staël, Auguste de, his parentage, 153
—— police report on his visits to Mme. Récamier, 154
—— presses Mme. Récamier to leave Paris, 200
Staël, Mme. de (1766—1817), parentage, 34 and *note*
—— acquaintance with Barras, 53
—— *Corinne*, 53 and *note*
—— manners under the Directory, 55 and *note*
—— meets Mme. Récamier, 55
—— *Letters on Rousseau*, 56
—— her influence on Mme. Récamier, 71, 77
—— mistress of Louis de Narbonne 72
—— mistress of Mathieu de Montmorency, 72
—— influence on Adrien de Montmorency, 75
—— her exile, 111, 116, 122
—— life at Coppet, 123, 142
—— Prince Augustus of Prussia, 122
—— Prince Louis of Prussia, 124 *note*
—— ideas on suicide, 131
—— *Essay on Suicide*, 131
—— Marengo, 138
—— *Sur les Allemands*, 143 and *note*
—— her friendship with de Rocca, 148, 149
—— letter to Mme. Récamier, 168
—— Benjamin Constant, 183
—— welcomes the Duke of Wellington, 213
—— illness and death, 214-6
—— a visit to her grave, 296

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